

585

**"TEATRO DI POESIA" IN THE OPERA HOUSE:
THE COLLABORATION OF
ANTONIO SMAREGLIA AND SILVIO BENCO**

Juliana Licinic



**PhD
University of Edinburgh
2002**



DECLARATION

This thesis has been composed by me alone and the work is entirely my own.

Juliana Licinic

A NOTE ON STYLE AND REFERENCES

The primary guidance for the details of style on which this thesis is based are *The Chicago Manual of Style* 1993, 14th edition, and Kate L. Turabian 1996, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th edition, both published in Chicago by Chicago University Press. In some instances their suggestions have been altered, such as in the use of quotations: the style with which the quotations and their translations are incorporated in the text corresponds with the layout of the main text; the quotations are set off, indented, and instead of 11 are given 10-point font size, in order to be presented in a compact and clear style. Numerous quotations are included in this thesis in order to best express and sustain the points of my discussions. All the translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

It will be noticed that the bibliography provided at the end of the thesis does not include the articles from various Italian newspapers, such as *La Perseveranza*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Il Sole*, *L'Indipendente*, and *Il Secolo*. In most cases these articles are the photocopies or the original cut-out extracts from reviews which have survived since 1897, but these are incomplete: they often omit the name of the article, the date, or in many cases the name of the journal they were published in. Instead of listing incomplete entries in the bibliography, we give as full as possible footnote description of each of the articles that are referred to in the thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement	i
Abstract	ii
List of illustrations	iii

Chapter I: Introduction

i. Smareglia in the history of Italian opera	1
ii. “ <i>Teatro di poesia</i> ” – the idea	4
iii. Music – general features	8
iv. Purpose and scope of this thesis	16

Chapter II: Antonio Smareglia - documentary study

1. Literature review – sources on Smareglia	19
i. Correspondence	20
ii. Memoirs	22
iii. Biographies	24
iv. Critical reviews	25
v. Modern studies	27
2. Cultural biography	30
i. Istria	32
ii. Early Viennese years	32
iii. Operatic life in Milan during Smareglia’s study years	33
iv. Viennese years (1887 – 1893).....	39
v. Turn of the century: Pola, Trieste, Venice and Milan (1894 – 1914).....	43

Chapter III: Silvio Benco

1. Introduction	59
2. Short biography	62
3. Benco as remembered in Italian literature	64
4. Benco as a librettist – ideas, characteristics and influences	69
5. Writings on music	74
6. Conclusion	76

Chapter IV: *La Falena* – “activity in dream”

1. Introduction	77
2. Synopsis	81
3. Decadence and <i>La Falena</i>	84
i. The nature of Decadence	84
ii. <i>La Falena</i> and the atmosphere of Decadence	90
4. Libretto	97
i. Comments on the drama: “activity in dream”	97
ii. Revisions of <i>Falena</i> – unpublished letters	100
iii. Literary structure – versification	107
5. Music	110
i. The image of <i>Falena</i>	113
ii. “Undramatic oneiric fantasy”	115
6. Conclusion	125

Chapter V: *Oceana* – tone poetry

1. Introduction	127
2. Synopsis	130
3. Libretto	133
i. Sources	133
ii. Benco's career around 1897	138
iii. "Teatro di poesia"	143
4. Music	146
i. Tone poetry	146
ii. Leitmotifs	154
5. Conclusion	164
6. Reception of <i>Oceana</i>	164

Chapter VI: *Abisso* – the explosion of the senses

1. Introduction	167
2. Synopsis	171
3. The Benco – Smareglia collaboration	174
4. The libretto of <i>Abisso</i>	181
i. The choice of subject	181
ii. "How was <i>Abisso</i> created"?	183
iii. The nature of the plot	184
iv. The element of eroticism in the drama	185
5. Music	188
i. Symphonism in the opera – "dramma sinfonizzato"	189
ii. Vocal writing in <i>Abisso</i> – "exasperating sing-song"	198
6. Conclusion	206

Chapter VI: Conclusion

i. Summary and conclusions	209
ii. How did such libretti influence Smareglia's interpretation?	212
iii. Suggestions for future research.....	213

Appendices:

A. Personalia	217
B. Unpublished letters	237
C. Time lines	249
D. <i>La Falena</i> – music examples	253
E. <i>Oceana</i> – music examples	265
F. <i>Abisso</i> – music examples	287

Bibliography	295
--------------------	-----

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my profound gratitude, both academic and personal, to a number of people who have helped me in the course of this study.

First and foremost gratitude goes to my supervisor, Professor David Kimbell, for his patience, expertise, stimulus and advice in guiding me throughout my research. Secondly, I am forever indebted to Dr. Raymond Monelle for his initial enthusiasm and encouragement to pursue a Ph. D. study at this University.

My research would not have been possible without the financial assistance of the University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Studentship for which I am very grateful. There are many other persons and institutions to whom I wish to express my thanks:

- the British Association of Women Graduates and the President's Fund-Edinburgh Association of Women Graduates, for their additional financial assistance.
- To all my colleagues at the University of Rijeka, Scientific library of Pula, in particular to its director, Bruno Dobric, for his patience and understanding
- To the Casa Musicale Sonzogno, in particular to Mrs. Patrizia and her teamwork, who have helped me during each of my research trips to Milan. I would like to thank them in particular for allowing me to borrow their materials for longer periods of time, as well as for allowing me to use lengthy parts of scores in my thesis.
- To the assistance of Stefano Bianchi and his colleagues at the Civico Museo Teatrale "Carlo Schmidl", as well as to the Biblioteca Civica "A. Hortis" in Trieste, for their help in gathering material for my work and for their permission to use some of their archival photographs in my thesis.

I am especially grateful to Adua Smareglia, the granddaughter of Antonio Smareglia. Her endless help over the years in providing me with information during my visits to Italy or via air mail has a particular value. My encounter with Adua Smareglia and the visit we paid to the granddaughter of Silvio Benco, Anna Gruber Benco, in the Spring of 1997, is one of the most unforgettable events of my life. My thesis is partially dedicated to Adua Smareglia and to the memory of Anna Gruber Benco.

Finally, an enormous gratitude goes to all my friends. If it wasn't for their endless enthusiasm and belief in me (and, gradually in Smareglia and his music!), this work would not have been rendered possible. Although it is impossible to list everyone here I would like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to all the library staff, especially to Jeremy Upton, to Luisa and Alice for checking up on my translations; to Dawn Durrant and to Jordan for their emergency help with my music examples; to Gavin, Eddie and Paul for their useful comments in discussing and proof reading of sections of my thesis; to my students, and to my 'Scottish' friends who come from all over the world: to my flatmates Silvia, Diane, Maria, Antoine, Sara, Ana, to Philip, to Nadia, to Xri and Jamie, and to those who have endured and have supported me the most: to Peggy, my mum Olga, my sister Margaret, to Michael, baby Martin, and to my Maarten.

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to demonstrate Smareglia's place in Italian opera at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries by means of a study of Smareglia's last three operas. An investigation of the unusual subjects and singular atmosphere of *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* shows their outstanding originality, and suggests that they belong to a "poetic theatre" created by the composer in collaboration with Silvio Benco.

The study explores the cultural background in which Smareglia worked. Since both Smareglia and Benco have to a large extent fallen into obscurity, and are hardly remembered in the history of opera, the first three chapters serve to introduce the two artists and define the scope of the material included in this study. The principal focus of the thesis is provided by the three operas. An examination of their peculiar and novel plots shows that Smareglia's musicality was stimulated by the literary taste of his librettist. Furthermore, it will be seen how in his reaction to Benco's *undramatic* stories and atmospheric settings, Smareglia moved away from the tastes and fashions of Italian opera of the period as exemplified in the work of his better known contemporary, Giacomo Puccini. The style of Benco's libretti and Smareglia's musical language show how the two artists gave musical aspects priority over dramatic ones in their determination to create a new style of opera. Absorbed in the climate of Symbolism and Decadence, they were at their best when creating what had come to be called a "*teatro di poesia*".

The research seeks to demonstrate how valuable Smareglia's contribution to the operatic repertory was: *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* are more original and imaginative than most of the operas written by his Italian contemporaries.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:

1. Antonio Smareglia in the 1880s.....	18
2. Antonio Smareglia in 1879	58
3. <i>The beguiling of Merlin</i> , Edward Burne-Jones (1874).....	80
4. <i>La Falena</i> , act I, a scene with a thief, <i>bozzetto</i> from 1899.....	83
5. <i>La belle dame sans merci</i> , John William Waterhouse (1893).....	93
6. Albina, <i>bozzetto</i> from the production of 1899	100
7. Uberto, <i>bozzetto</i> from the production of 1899	107
8. The image of Falena from 1899.....	112
9. Albina, image from 1899.....	115
10. Smareglia and Benco around 1898	126
11. <i>Oceana</i> , cover page of the first edition of the libretto	129
12. <i>The naiads at play</i> , Arnold Böcklin (1886)	132
13. <i>Oceana</i> , act II, Nersa at the beach, 1903	148
14. Ers and Uls, stage design from 1903.	150
15. <i>Oceana</i> and Uls, stage design from 1903	163
16. <i>Abisso</i> , stage setting of act III	170
17. The caricature of Giovannina Lucca and Antonio Smareglia	215

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows
that the work is new, complex, and vital.*

[Oscar Wilde, from the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*]

I. 1 Smareglia in the history of Italian opera

Many studies have been written on Italian opera at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Scholars interpret various aspects of its history, contributing to the overall picture. However, few works are dedicated to the generation of composers usually referred to as “*la giovane scuola*” (young Italian school).¹ Nicolaisen’s *Italian Opera in Transition: 1871-1893* is perhaps the only book which collects together most members of this generation born in the period from the mid-1850s to mid-1860s. Nicolaisen’s publication is a comprehensive study which summarises their achievements up to 1893, since by that year a “new and flexible sort of drama emerged” (Nicolaisen 1980: 3). Specialist studies related to Catalani, Franchetti, Mascagni, Cilea, Giordano and particularly to Smareglia, are rare.² It is notable that the writings on Italian opera concentrate on the key figures, such as Verdi, in the 19th century, and Puccini, at the turn of the 20th century. Although Nicolaisen’s work is devoted in the main to Ponchielli, Boito, Catalani and Puccini, the author groups together the rest of the generation as “the contemporaries of Puccini”.³ Smareglia is not even mentioned in *Italian Opera in Transition*, since his contribution was ‘coming’ from abroad: in other words, for those several years preceding 1893, Smareglia was establishing his operatic career in Vienna. Such accounts and omissions however, can be explained by the fact that there was not much space left for minor composers. All the attention, both scholarly and publicly, went to Verdi and Puccini and to their exceptional achievements, their own attractive and complex artistic personalities, their popularity and what Carner described as “universal appeal” (Carner 1992: 292).

¹ Julian Budden, in his definition of “*la giovane scuola*” includes Catalani, Leoncavallo, Puccini, Franchetti, Mascagni, Giordano, Cilea and Smareglia. See Julian Budden 1992, “*La Giovane Scuola*” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. by Stanley Sadie, vol. 2, pp. 428-429.

² Since 1985 several international conferences have been held, for example, on Leoncavallo, Mascagni and Smareglia. In each case, proceedings have been published.

³ “The contemporaries of Puccini” include Leoncavallo, Franchetti, Mascagni, Cilea and Giordano. See Jay Nicolaisen 1980, *Italian Opera in Transition: 1871-1893*, Michigan: UMI Research Press, p. 241.

Inevitably, therefore, the picture of the late 19th and early 20th century opera is largely conditioned by our understanding of Puccini. The consequences of such a view are both beneficial and harmful. Because of numerous varied and in-depth studies of Puccini, such as the encyclopedic critical biography by Mosco Carner, we are able to view the Italian operatic scene of the period and map the cultural background to which Puccini's contemporaries belong. In that respect, these studies are fundamental to this thesis. In addition, besides Carner and Nicolaisen, the compendium studies such as Kimbell's *Italian Opera*, Budden's *The Operas of Verdi*, and the writings of various Italian authors allow a deeper understanding of the period. We are able to learn about significant issues: for example, the advent of *verismo* operas from Sansone's "Verismo from Literature to Opera", and the influence of Wagner from Budden's "Wagnerian Tendencies in Italian Opera".⁴

On the other hand, because of Puccini's genius, little space was given to any comprehensive and systematic treatment of other artists of his time. Even Nicolaisen encountered the problem, pointing out that "Italian composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries are particularly neglected".⁵ There are many post-Verdian composers who never found a central place either on the repertoires or in the operatic history. There are considerable gaps in the literature. In the study by John C. G. Waterhouse entitled *The Emergence of Modern Italian Music (up to 1940)* "more than fifty minor Italian composers" emerged!⁶ Referring to these artists as "lesser lights", the author summarised his discoveries:

[P]ublications on some of the more obscure among these minor composers are almost non-existent, consisting of little more than musical dictionary-entries, contemporary reviews of particular works, and perhaps an occasional ephemeral propaganda article. (Waterhouse, *The Emergence of Modern Italian Music*, iii)

Antonio Smareglia is an example of a composer one does come across in a comprehensive study such as the one by Waterhouse. The author recognised Smareglia, along with Catalani, as an "escapist romantic", and a worshiper at "foreign shrines". Waterhouse saw the two artists as young men who emerged as the most original composers during the times of *scapigliatura*.⁷

⁴ The full reference to sources mentioned are Mosco Carner 1992, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 3rd ed., London: Duckworth & co.; David Kimbell 1991, *Italian Opera*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Matteo Sansone 1987, "Verismo from Literature to Opera", University of Edinburgh Ph.D. Thesis; Julian Budden 1987, "Wagnerian Tendencies in Italian Opera", in *Music and Theatre: Essays in Honour of Winton Dean*, ed. by Nigel Fortune, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 299 – 332; Julian Budden 1992, *The Operas of Verdi*, revised ed., 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press: Calendon Paperbacks.

⁵ The author "lists" the statistics which transpire from the sources such as Grout's *A History of Western Music*: on "Boito, Catalani, and Ponchielli – nothing, Puccini – one sentence ...", see Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera*, p. 271.

⁶ Waterhouse's number applied to the generation born between 1875 and 1900. See John C. G. Waterhouse 1968, "The Emergence of Modern Italian Music (up to 1940)", University of Oxford Ph. D. Thesis.

⁷ For a discussion on *scapigliatura* see Chapter II 2. iii and Chapter IV. 3. i.

The time spent abroad in their youth (Catalani in Paris, Smareglia in Graz and Vienna), their admiration and assimilation of foreign styles, Wagner's in particular, led them to "show signs of new attitudes" while resisting public tastes and fashion. As a result, both Catalani and Smareglia withdrew into themselves, ending up being two isolated composers who kept encountering various degrees of indifference or hostility from publishers or audiences.

Although there has been a distinct lack of regard for Smareglia and his contribution to Italian operatic history, it is interesting to note that where he and his work are discussed, the references are complex and peculiar. In the studies of scholars such as Salvetti, Budden, Sansone and Waterhouse, Smareglia is considered as an artist whose complex personality, unconventional taste and musical style demands more than merely a passing mention.⁸ It is not simple to categorise Smareglia, as is often done with his contemporaries, the so-called "young Italian school". The perceptions of the authors referred to above are encountered throughout the course of this thesis. It is especially significant that the research findings corroborate their views and elaborate them further.

One example of a study which views Smareglia and his last three operas in a more distinctive context is Salvetti's investigation of the Italian *novecento*: the composer and his works are placed in the section dedicated to the Decadent and Symbolist dramaturgy which employed "dannunzian" libretti. More importantly, Salvetti pointed out that, following *scapigliatura*, whose influence on the composers and on the overall intellectual atmosphere was "revolutionary" and "*avvenirista*", a "new type of theatre" gradually appeared. To quote Salvetti, this was a "*teatro letterato e di poesia*" which emerged "in the decade of Mancinelli and Smareglia, and in the 1900s with Busoni and Gian Francesco Malipiero" (Salvetti 1996: 373). Salvetti's discussion of the existence of an anti-theatrical operatic tendency - a "poetic" theatre - supports the premises of this thesis. His mention of Malipiero and his desire to set D'Annunzio's play *Sogno d'un tramonto d'autunno* (1897) to music is also relevant to bear in mind, since this particular work can be regarded as one of the earliest examples of D'Annunzio's concept of "*teatro di poesia*". In describing Malipiero's work, Salvetti quoted Waterhouse: D'Annunzio's text is set to music "*in uno stile di arioso sostenuto*".⁹ In addition, it is useful to know that Malipiero was Smareglia's student and amanuensis for some years while

⁸ See Guido Salvetti 1996, "Il novecento italiano", in *Musica in scena: Storia dello spettacolo musicale*, vol. 2, part 5, ed. by Alberto Basso. Sansone's articles on "Antonio Smareglia", " 'La Falena' " and " 'Oceana' ", included in *The New Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, are also considered in this study.

⁹ In Salvetti, "Il novecento italiano", p. 465, quoting from Waterhouse's book: John Waterhouse 1991, *Gian Francesco Malipiero*, Rome: Eri, p. 37. Malipiero had conceived the idea of setting D'Annunzio's *Sogno d'un tramonto d'autunno* in 1911, completing it just before the First World War; see John C. G. Waterhouse 1999, *Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882 – 1973): the Life, Times and Music of a Wayward Genius*, Contemporary Music Studies, 17. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, pp. 17-18.

Smareglia lived in Venice. Furthermore, in his earliest operatic works Malipiero collaborated with Benco.¹⁰

It will be seen that Smareglia's place in the history of Italian opera, the manner in which the composer and his work were viewed, or the instances where his contributions were overlooked will be discussed in some detail in this thesis. A more detailed discussion of D'Annunzio and his collaboration with composers extends beyond the scope and limits of this section of introduction. Of further relevance is the poet's involvement with the operatic stage. It began with the members of the "young Italian school" and was carried on with the following generation, born in the 1880s. While it is obvious that Smareglia belonged to "*la giovane scuola*", the composer seldom receives credit for it. One of the reasons for carrying out this research is, in fact, to demonstrate how vivid his presence and how valuable his contribution were. The study of Smareglia and his last three operas is important in order to gain a more complete knowledge of the development of Italian opera at the turn of the century. A part of this development concerns the unusual form of a "poetic theatre".

I. 2 "Teatro di poesia" – the idea

It is necessary to explain the title of this thesis. The rationale for choosing it is found in the way in which the term has been used in literature and in operatic criticism at the turn of the century in Italy. The expression is primarily encountered in connection with the literary style of D'Annunzio, in particular with his theatrical works. My title emphasises that Smareglia and Benco's operas belong to this category.

The element of the poetic which stands out in Smareglia's last three operas, making them appear unusual at the time of their first performances, was an indicator which the more perceptive critics, such as Cameroni at the time of *Oceana*'s premiere, interpreted as "new paths" in the composer's career. This new path can be largely explained by the fact that Smareglia was collaborating with Benco, a writer with his own distinctive style. However, it was also prompted by changes that were affecting the Italian literary theatre. Besides the popularity of *veristic* theatre, there was a new style in the air that involved inaugurating a

¹⁰ For more about Malipiero and Smareglia, and Malipiero's collaboration with Benco, see Chapter VI and Personalia, Appendix A. Also, see John C. G. Waterhouse, *Gian Francesco Malipiero*, pp. 5-6, 10, 17, 92-94, 109 – 115.

different, more “poetic” kind of theatre. Those responsible for this innovation were D’Annunzio and his new collaborator at the time, the actress Eleonora Duse.¹¹

It remains unclear who first actually used the term “*teatro di poesia*”. For example, in the preface to his play *Più che l’amore* (1906), D’Annunzio’s speaks of “*opera di poesia*”.¹² It is known that from the 1890s onwards, particularly from 1894, the year in which the poet and Duse met in Venice, the expression was used to describe the kind of theatre the poet was developing with the actress. Various studies on Eleonora Duse have pointed to the actress’s “unsparing search for higher objectives in art and a ‘theatre of poetry’ ” (Pontiero 1982: ix). Duse, the artist who was remembered “as one of the most expressive and magnetic actresses in the history of modern theatre”, was noted for her desire to create a modern kind of theatre “where only the highest and noblest art shall flourish” (ibid.: 16). In an interview for *Tribuna* in 1898 she confided her aspirations and her search for “innovations in the Italian theatre, ... of a new form of dramatic art ‘essentially noble and pure’ ” (ibid.: 22). These ideas complemented perfectly D’Annunzio’s own ideas: the poet was at the time contemplating to write for theatre, longing to create a “new modern tragedy”. The art form would unite dance, poetry and music, and restore in the theatre “*admiring images, nobility of language, musicality of verse and of prose, poeticism of style*” (Barsotti 1978: 18).¹³ The first play with which he attempted to realise his invention was *La città morta* (1896).

A particular curiosity among D’Annunzio and Duse’s aspirations was their plan to build, modeled on Wagner’s Bayreuth, a special festival, open-air theatre near lake Albano, south of Rome. Although this ambitious project was never realised, what remains significant is the view the two artists had of such a theatre: the setting was to be particularly suggestive, and would revive a classical repertoire, following the example of Greek tragedy.¹⁴ The projects which

¹¹ Eleonora Duse (in or near Vigevano, in Lombardy 1858 – Pittsburgh 1924), one of the most celebrated Italian actresses, who is most remembered for her interpretative roles in the works of D’Annunzio and of Ibsen. Duse earned most laudatory opinions for her creativity and expressive acting; she is said to have had the ability to ‘play what was between the lines’. For more on Duse and on her encounter, relationship and collaboration with D’Annunzio see William Weaver 1984, *Duse: A Biography*, London: Thames and Hudson, and Giovanni Pontiero trans. 1982, *Duse on Tour: Guido Noccioli’s Diaries*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

¹² The word “opera” in the Italian language meaning “work of art”. D’Annunzio used this expression in the preface of his play *Più che l’amore, tragedia moderna in due episodi*; see Anna Barsotti 1978, “Il ‘teatro di poesia’ ”, in *Rivista Italiana di Drammaturgia* 9-10, p. 26.

¹³ “La nuova tragedia moderna di G. D’Annunzio” was a title of one critic’s review of D’Annunzio’s *Più che l’amore*, which was performed in Rome in 1906. This play is considered to be the most complete statement of the aims of the poet’s “*teatro di poesia*”, and is conceived as “*tragedia moderna in due episodi*”. The full title of the play is accompanied by the following commentary: “*preceduta da un discorso e accresciuta d’un preludio d’un intermezzo e d’un esodio*”.

¹⁴ D’Annunzio apparently got the idea for the Albano theatre following his visit to Orange in France where an outdoor theatre had been built to stage Greek drama authentically. It seems that no work was ever done on building the theatre; the poet realised his ambition years later when in the 1930s he built the Teatro del Vittoriale on the grounds of his estate on Lake Garda. I owe this suggestion to Dr. Paul Barnaby, University of Edinburgh Library.

would be performed in this theatre were the “works of those new artists who considered the drama to be a revelation of beauty communicated to the crowd, and the scenic arch to be a window opening upon an ideal transfiguration of life” (Weaver 1984: 133). The reason for building a special theatre for these purposes, as the two artists believed, was to “revive classical drama” in order to “capture the imagination of the Italian public and restore ‘an ideal conception of drama in its purest form’ ” (Pontiero 1982: 16).

Although their project met with little interest from the actors or the critics of the time, and was continuously denounced through the press in both Italy and France, these ideas were sustained by some artists and intellectuals, among whom were Smareglia and Benco.¹⁵ Clear evidence for their plans to collaborate with D’Annunzio and his “*teatro di Albano*” comes to light in one of Smareglia’s unpublished letters:

Attendo *La fiamma fredda* per la quale ho grande curiosità. D’Annunzio ti ha mai scritto? Sai niente del progetto d’Albano? Nemmeno circa l’idea del poeta sulla tragedia musicale progettata e che dovevamo fare assieme ? [Smareglia to Benco, see Appendix B, letter 1254]

[I am awaiting *La fiamma fredda* with great curiosity. Did D’Annunzio ever write to you? Do you know anything of the Albano project? Anything about the idea of the poet on the musical tragedy which was planned and which we were supposed to do together?]

Though the quoted letter remains incomplete, bearing no signature or date, it is likely that it originated in the years between 1902 - 1904, around the time D’Annunzio and Benco began to develop their friendship. As D’Annunzio’s letters to Benco indicate, the poet was currently helping Benco with the publishing of his novel *La fiamma fredda*.¹⁶ The fact that Smareglia and Benco planned a future collaboration with D’Annunzio, involving the theatre in Albano in particular, stands out as strong indication of their ambition to create a new work of art. More importantly, this letter is our direct link: it allows us to bring the expression of “*teatro di poesia*” to the very front of the investigation of the three Benco – Smareglia operas.

In the case of *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso*, the expression “*poesia*” refers to the concept of Benco’s libretti and to the manner in which Smareglia’s music ennobled these texts. The three operas reveal that the collaboration between the two artists was moving in the direction of

¹⁵ According to William Weaver the project of constructing a theatre in Albano aroused a considerable interest at first; thus, “committees were promptly formed – after the model of Wagner societies that supported Bayreuth – but far less effective – and funds were offered”, see William Weaver, *Duse*, p. 199.

¹⁶ We learn from various sources that Benco and D’Annunzio met in 1902. See also Chapter II and III. D’Annunzio’s assistance with the publishing of Benco’s book is confirmed in his letter addressed to Benco. This letter is kept in Biblioteca Civica “A. Hortis” in Trieste, catalogued as n. 31250. Benco is mentioned on several occasions in D’Annunzio’s letters to the Milan’s publisher Treves, see Gabriele D’Annunzio 1999, *Gabriele D’Annunzio: lettere ai Treves*, ed. by Gianni Oliva, Milan: Garzanti.

fashioning a different kind of musical theatre. This thesis argues that the ultimate purpose of Smareglia and Benco was to create music dramas absorbed in their poetic atmospheres, leaving very little that was effectively dramatic (as commonly understood). This differed from the manner of Puccini when, for example, he was creating an exotic ambience with authentic Japanese tunes, as in *Madama Butterfly*. Puccini's poetic atmosphere is fused with the plot but has no priority over the dramatic treatment. In contrast, Benco and Smareglia were creating fantastic worlds, as in *Oceana* and *Falena*, or *quasi* historical, in *Abisso*, which were anti-theatrical, delicate and symbolic. Such operatic worlds would produce an *effect* similar to what D'Annunzio was producing with his own plays. Barsotti pointed out that the audacity of "*teatro di poesia*" was a kind of dramaturgy, of scenography, of reciting-style which would boost the performance using "stimulating atmospheres, away from the present or from the past" (*atmosfere eccitanti, fuori della storia presente come della passata*) (Barsotti 1978:18). D'Annunzio wanted to create "anti-realistic and symbolic forms" (ibid.: 26). Barsotti's view is confirmed by D'Annunzio's own conception, which he outlined in the preface to his play *Più che l'amore*. Defining it as "*tragedia moderna ... preceduta da un discorso, accresciuta d'un preludio d'un intermezzo e d'un esodio*", the poet pointed out that his play was a "work of poetry and not ... of an empiric reality" (*un'opera di poesia e non ... una realtà empirica*) (ibid.: 26).

Further support for this kind of theatrical work can be found in the criticism of D'Annunzio's writings. One example is his tragic poem in one act, *Il sogno di un mattino di primavera*, first staged in Venice in 1897, only two months after Smareglia and Benco's *Falena* had its premiere at the city's famous theatre La Fenice. The play had a cool reception, "showed no action as a play; matters of location and time were vaguely defined, and the work seemed to hover uncertainly between reality and fantasy" (Pontiero 1982: 17). The French critics defined it as a "*poème dialogue*" rather than a real drama, and saw the poet's play as "childish and pretentious ... of unrelieved boredom" (ibid.: 15). It will be seen that similar kinds of commentaries were addressed to Benco in the case of each of the three libretti he wrote for Smareglia. Further discussion of the concept of "*teatro di poesia*", will be raised in the course of this thesis, primarily in the Chapter on *Oceana*.

I.3 Music – general features

A me sembra ... che la melodia sia la risultante di tutti quegli elementi musicali che contribuiscono a raggiungere la sintetica espressione. [Smareglia, "Come nascono le melodie?", in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 303]

[To me it seems that ... melody is the result of all those musical elements which contribute in reaching an expressive synthesis.]

Smareglia's claim that melody is created when all musical elements fuse into an indivisible whole embodies the essence of his approach to the composition of an opera. The fact that in order to illustrate this point further he mentioned the second movement (*Allegretto*) from Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* and then Wagner's Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*, reveals what were the points of departure in the development of his own compositional technique. It will be seen that the chapters of the thesis which are dedicated to the three operas, Chapters IV, V and VI, discuss their libretti and music by analysing what, in my opinion, seem to be the most important and most particular aspects of the three operas. This means that the studies of the libretti, the sources and the atmospheres of *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* are combined with the examination of the musical language, its quality and significance. A full music analysis of each of them would exceed the bounds of the present thesis. In fact, a separate investigation of each opera could extend into a thesis of its own. However, before explaining the particularities of music in each of the chapters, it seems appropriate to introduce, in the most general terms, the main elements of Smareglia's compositional style.

It is primarily Smareglia's music, the manner in which the composer established the moods and drew attention to actions, which defines the style of the three operas as being poetic or what might be called "poetic theatre". There are four principal aspects of music which enhance this poetic effect and which are common to the three operas: symphonism, leitmotifs, the harmonic style and the vocal writing. The most significant among them which wraps up the other three, is an all-pervading symphonism. The musico-dramatic structure of *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* reveals uninterrupted orchestral textures, a device which can be found in all post-Wagnerian operas. However, what distinguishes Smareglia from his contemporaries is the continuous density of these textures, and the fact that the principal generator of the drama is the orchestra. In his approach to creating an opera, the focus of Smareglia's writing is primarily placed on instrumental music and its efficiency; he concentrated more on what music can do rather than on what is *dramatically* most effective on stage. This attitude became even more apparent after he went blind in 1900: stimulated by a wealth of images from Bencao's texts Smareglia's symphonic imagination was able to flourish. This meant that at times his orchestral commentary was so active that it seemed independently to articulate the drama. It will be seen

that the composer often isolated moments of the plot, producing autonomous sections, conveying for example, *Oceana*'s "dance of the waves", or *Falena*'s "hypnotic music". At other times, Smareglia enhanced the role of the orchestra in developing extended preludes or interludes.¹⁷ In the case of *Oceana*, for example, the extended form of its overture is a borderline case between a symphonic poem and a concert overture. In introducing the material from various sections of the opera, the composer adopted the traditional logic of symphonic thought, bringing its overall formal design close to sonata form.¹⁸

One of the devices through which Smareglia interlaces the unbroken musical flow are the leitmotifs. Many leading themes can be found in the three operas. We can note that the composer uses them in a manner broadly similar to Wagner's. This means that besides their structural function they are also endowed with a dramatic significance. Although consistent in associating these themes with specific characters (as in *Oceana*) or with different concepts (in *Falena*), Smareglia's mode of adopting leitmotifs is not as rigorous as that of the German composer. Furthermore, the music analysis reveals difficulties in defining a clear line between themes, motifs and their appearances, in particular since they are richly interlaced into the orchestral fabric. In *Oceana*, for example, the opera in which the dramatic element is particularly subdued for its predominantly poetic images, many of the motifs seem to be used with purely musical interest [such as theme linked with Nersa, see Chapter V, **Example V A**].

The complex picture which transpires from the scores induced several scholars, such as Levi, to view Smareglia's leading themes as immutable and to be more reminiscence themes rather than real leitmotifs.¹⁹ However, special attention will be given to the cases which confirm the opposite. It will be seen that Smareglia's leitmotifs primarily comment on or react to the events on the stage, changing their appearance in response to those events. In addition, we learn of

¹⁷ The prelude to act III of *Abisso* is discussed in Chapter VI.

¹⁸ See Vito Levi 1949, *Oceana di Antonio Smareglia: piccola guida verso l'opera*, Trieste: Casa Musicale Giuliana, pp. 26 – 27. The overture of *Oceana* was in fact, often performed on its own. At the concert held in Trieste's theatre Politeama Rossetti, in 1923, it was conducted by Richard Strauss.

¹⁹ Levi expressed this view on several occasions. See for example his commentary in the programme book from the Teatro Verdi, season 1974-75, on the occasion of the staging of *La Falena* on 18 March 1975, conducted by Gianandrea Gavazzeni.

their significance from the dramatic context in which they appear; for example the motif of Uls, several times ‘announced’ prior to its first appearance [see **Example I. 3. A**]:

Example I. 3. A

“Uls”



“Uls motif announced”



Although Levi accurately noted that the motifs are primarily used in their original form, in some cases themes do undergo transformations, in their rhythmic as well as harmonic structure, when underlining the dramatic significance of the plot. A particularly visible example can be found in *Oceana*, in the motif of the sea genius, Ers: clothed with an orchestral theme of a capricious character, his personality transfigures in order to make him appear more kind and convincing [see **Example I. 3. B**]. From a fast, augmented chord, the theme moves into a placid, diatonic harmony.²⁰

Example I. 3. B

“Ers motif”



“Ers motif transformed”



The harmonic style in which these uninterrupted textures are embedded shows particular richness. Smareglia revealed, in each of the three operas, his absorption of the advances of

²⁰ Cf. Chapter V. 4. ii, discussion on leitmotifs.

Wagner's harmonic language and his gift to develop his own style; in *Abisso*, act II, there is Wagner-like chromaticism [see **Example I. 3. C**]:

Example I. 3. C – *Abisso*, act II, v. s. p. 134-135

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system (pages 134-135) features vocal parts for M. (Male) and H. (Female) and piano accompaniment. The M. part has the lyrics: "mor che mi por-ti... è mia so-rel-la!". The H. part has the lyrics: "Ah, se in-ter-ce-di lu.". The piano part includes markings: "un poco animando", "Un poco più", "mozzo. ♩. 56.", "Gisca.", "La vi-ta pren-di-mi!", "Io so-no tut-la lu-a...", "dim.", "p", and "mf". The second system (page 135) features vocal parts for G. (Female) and piano accompaniment. The G. part has the lyrics: "Tu di-ce-si che io ti son vol-gi-ta me...". The piano part includes markings: "Hanno. (a Mariela)", "Ah, se vuoi tu pla-car-mi...", "cresc.", and "mf".

The analysis shows that the composer abundantly uses a variety of altered chords, or secondary 7th and 9th chords. We notice his tendency to modulate continuously, showing a preference for positioning the most distant tonalities one next to another, or to use harmonic sequences producing effects close to those of the Impressionists. Furthermore, there are progressions involving a series of augmented chords, 'unresolved' discords, and shifts from major to minor tonality, features which are recognised as characteristic of the harmonic vocabulary of *Tristan*. It will be seen that Smareglia often obscures the tonal structure in his tendency to use sustained harmonies as a basis above which there are 'decorations' of appoggiaturas, anticipations, passing and suspension notes, or an oscillation of chord structures different to the main tonality [see Chapter V, **Example V A**].

The vocal writing holds a particular place in these three operas. What is distinctive about Smareglia's lyricism is the manner in which the composer fuses the voice into the symphonic texture. There is an unbroken musical flow: the orchestral polyphony fuses together with the voice into an indivisible whole, revealing flexible and fluid melodic patterns. Characteristic for Smareglia are the seemingly half-finished phrases which are completed or overtaken by another voice or an instrument. The composer bonds one fragment to another into an "endless melody", as in the **Example I. 3. D**: the melodic line of Hanno in act III of *Abisso* is completed by Mariela:

Example 1. 3. D - *Abisso*, act III, orchestral score p. 25-26:

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal lines for Hanno (H.) and Mariela (M.). Hanno's line begins with a melodic phrase that is then completed by Mariela. The second system shows the orchestral accompaniment, which includes a piano (p) and a forte (f) dynamic marking. The score is written in 4/4 time and features various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'p' and 'f'.

H. *ni - a che non-è lu don - na i-to - la, 'rer-se l'ari - en - to*

M. *ni - a che non-è lu don - na i-to - la, 'rer-se l'ari - en - to*

Example I. 3. D - p. 26

Handwritten musical score for "Il Matino" by Giuseppe Verdi. The score is for a full orchestra and voices. It includes parts for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba, Percussion, Harp, Piano, and Voice. The music is in 3/4 time, key of D major, and consists of three measures. The first measure shows the piano and strings. The second measure shows the voices and piano. The third measure shows the piano and strings. The score is handwritten and includes various musical notations such as dynamics (p, f, cresc., dim.), articulation (acc.), and performance instructions (solo, tr.).

A further example *par excellence* of a vocal melody rising out of the orchestral texture is the scene following the prelude to act III of *Abisso* in which Smareglia carefully integrated Mariela's voice into the music fabric [see Chapter VI, **Example VI D, a-e**].

On the other hand, the analysis reveals that Smareglia also absorbed the traditions of Italian opera, and at times communicated his ideas in a manner that is reminiscent of the intensity reached by Puccini. Although it is generally difficult to detect aria and duet-like structures in these operas, there are examples that produce the same *effect*. The flexible melodic patterns at times develop into most expressive arioso, showing warmth and a sensuous line. One example which will be examined later is in *Abisso*: the dramatic and highly charged aria of Gisca. It consists of three principal sections which unfold in a free manner, vaguely suggesting an 'ABA' form: however the three principal sections do not correspond to the three verses of Benco's text [see **Appendix F** and Chapter VI. 5.ii].

Another example which stands out can be found in Falena's lyrical arioso, "Te, te voglio", in act II of the opera, during which for a moment, the *femme fatale* has an intense and irresistible effect on the listener [see **Example I. 3. E**]. This melodic line is a good example of the winding chromaticism which Smareglia usually infuses in vocal parts as well as his tendency to develop certain parts of the phrase sequentially.²¹ The pace is moderate, its phrasing subtle and at the same time restless, as the melody steps in a circular phrasing, often ending with a 'dropping interval' of minor second:

²¹ Smareglia's tendency to reiterate some parts of the melodic line is one of the most frequently encountered devices in his vocal writing. It derives from his inclination to symphonism: short one bar or half-bar phrases are the initial material and are subject to development in the ongoing musical flow.

Example I. 3. E – *Falena*, act II, v. s. p. 95

La Falena. Die Falene. (La Falena avviene Stello con un amplesso furioso, la stringe, lo lascia rapido.) 95
 (Die Falene drückt Stello in einer wilden Umarmung an ihre Brust, sie küßt ihn rasch u. leidenschaftlich.)
 Allegro non troppo. (♩ = 116)

Te... le vo - glo, Di te la gio - vi - nez - za Di te l'a - mo - re
 Dich... dich will ich Die Wen - ne dei - ner Ja - gend, dein gun - zen Sein
 Allegro non troppo. (♩ = 116)

Di te l'a - mo - re... Di te la vo - lut - tà...
 die hei - ßen Küß - ne... das Jauch - zen dei - ner Lust
 cresc.

Bra - mo la tua co - ro - na... Tho - ier - se - - ra spi - a - - to la
 Dich und dei - ne Kro - nel Ge - stern A - - bend be - lausch' ich den
 cresc.

vo - ce e la ca - rez - za A - mor non
 Zu - ber dei - ner Slim - me... Was Lie - be,
 dim. p. cresc.

eb - bi mai... Gli a - man - ti al - la mor - te ho chia - ma - to. (vincolandosi)
 Stello! Ver - häng - nis be - deut' ich und Tod! (sich losmachend)
 Al - bi - na Al -
 Schütz' mich Al -

J. E. 1225.

As will be seen, the three operas show that in his response to Benco's texts the composer introduced some details of style and formal principles which his works had never shown before. The advances of these works over his earlier opera, *Nozze istriane* (Trieste 1895), are considerable; the composer moved away from the realistic evocation of the drama and the Istrian folklore suggested in Illica's libretto. The lyric realism of *Nozze istriane* shows an effective musico-dramatic structure which, however, contains the traces of closed forms in the vocal writing, vivacious *parlando* recitatives, and elements of Istrian folklore used for both

decorative and dramatic effect.²² In general, if we compare *Nozze istriane* to the last three operas, Smareglia's imagination had previously appeared conditioned to follow the drama more in a traditional manner and in accordance with the fashions and tastes of the times (the *verismo* operas). *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* have richer harmonic and melodic invention and a more developed orchestral language. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that many aspects of Smareglia's musical expression were established in *Nozze istriane*: his tendency to develop and fuse scenes freely according to the logic of drama, to employ dramatically significant leitmotifs, chromatic progressions in the vocal writing, or 'sliding' modulations (such as Bflat to Bmajor). Although he was greatly influenced by Benco's anti-theatrical stories, and in spite of his blindness, Smareglia's attitude to these texts was freer, marking the evolution of his opera and of what came to be labeled "poetic theatre".

1.4 Purpose and scope of this thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate Smareglia's place in Italian opera at the turn of the century by means of a study of his last three operas. On a broader scale however, the intention of this thesis is multifold. It draws attention to the particular collaboration of the composer with his librettist and it highlights the novel operatic tendency which emerged at the end of the century - the development of "*teatro di poesia*". Moreover, it aims to engage the interests of other academics and musicians, and to encourage further studies of those artists, such as Smareglia, whom Waterhouse named "lesser lights" but who made very significant contributions.

The first three chapters serve to introduce Smareglia and Benco and define the scope of the material included in this study. They also provide the background (cultural, social and artistic) in which Smareglia and his librettist worked. Since both Smareglia and Benco are scarcely to be found in the history of literature and of opera, it is important to introduce the two artists before actually studying in detail the operas they created together. Chapter II explores the context of the operatic tradition which Smareglia was a part of, surveying the repertoires, tendencies and artistic climate of the period in both Italian cities and in Vienna. It presents a discussion of the performances of his operas, as well as describing his attitudes and the vicissitudes of life which influenced his career. The fact that Smareglia became blind just after having completed *Falena*, and that he was constrained to dictate all his future works makes his achievements all the more remarkable. The remainder of the chapter look at the artists around

²² In the opera Smareglia uses a 'love song' - *stornello*, a form of an old Italian folk poetry from the 16th century, as well as *vilotta*, one of the oldest dances known in Istria performed at weddings (area of Dignano). When expressing anger *vilotta* changes into *bottonada*; this form is also employed in *Nozze istriane*.

Smareglia and how the composer managed to create such original and imaginative operas as *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso*.

Chapter III investigates the figure of Silvio Benco. In the course of this research it became particularly difficult to deal comprehensively with the vast amount of material which Benco had left in his writing. Benco is a fascinating subject to study because of his contribution to Italian literature, his patriotism, intellectualism and his involvement with music. However, as a result, the chapter devoted to Benco is frustratingly short, and only begins to outline his qualities and his contributions to the cultural life of the period. The emphasis was placed on his role as Smareglia's librettist. It is hoped, however, that this thesis will stimulate future research of Benco.

The investigation of *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* is structured by placing its emphasis on each opera's most characteristic features. In this way the analyses provide a variety and at the same time complement one another. It will be noticed that special attention has been paid to the three libretti, to the examination of their subjects and to the sources which influenced Benco's imagination.

The study of *Falena* in Chapter IV is designed in its relation to the atmosphere of fin de siècle and the "decadent imagination" (Pierrot) which influenced Benco in inventing such a subject. The chapter also includes a discussion of unpublished letters which refer to the alterations of the libretto, demonstrating the falsity of those claims that Smareglia was not involved in their fashioning. A small section is devoted to examining the literary structure of the libretto. Its purpose was to provide a sample of Benco's versification, as the evocative and symbolic images play such a large part in his stories. The music analysis of *Falena* focuses on the manner in which the composer evoked Falena's image and the irrational world inhabited by the two protagonists.

Chapter V on *Oceana* gives particular attention to the sources which inspired Benco's imagination in creating a "fantastic comedy" situated in the sea world. The predominantly poetic content of the story led the librettist to conceive the text in an unusual manner, providing *images* which were to be animated by music. Such a picturesque story directed the composer to create the kind of opera in which the atmospheric painting prevails over the drama.

The chapter on the last opera, *Abisso*, examines the nature of the plot, pointing out how Benco's writing was absorbed by the subjects of Decadence. His fusion of two ostensibly traditional themes within the plot (love and war) produced a story which proved to be controversial, in particular with respect to its elements of eroticism. Smareglia's interpretation of such a libretto resulted in particularly independent orchestral writing and in the densest

fusion of symphonism with vocal parts. In short, the concern of chapters IV, V and VI is to see what were the features of these operas which caused them to be considered as “poetic theatre”, and to question why they are significant.



Illustration 1: Antonio Smareglia in the 1880s, photo from Civico Museo Teatrale “Carlo Schmidl” in Trieste.

CHAPTER II

ANTONIO SMAREGLIA – DOCUMENTARY STUDY

II. 1 Literature review – sources on Smareglia

Despite the fact that very few, other than opera specialists, have heard of Antonio Smareglia, there are quite a substantial number of sources that talk about his life and art. His activities in cities such as Milan, Venice, Vienna, Trieste or Pola always aroused much interest, resulting in a series of writings about him or his operas. Each opera's performance was followed by a large number of critical reviews and, on certain occasions (such as for the production of *Nozze istriane*, or *Oceana*) specialised studies were published in the form of short guides that enabled the reader to have a better understanding of a particular opera's musico-dramatic structure. This thesis is based on those materials which made the most significant contribution to our state of knowledge about the composer, particularly those relating to the last three operas. There is a vast amount of relevant material available, some of which will only be mentioned as references in the bibliography for possible further reading.

Smareglia was one of the few composers who enjoyed the privilege of having had dedicated to him a whole series of *feuilletons* called *Cronache Smaregliane*. This was a supplement to *Cronache d'Arte*, a journal published in the 1930s in Trieste by Casa Musicale Giuliana, which was established by Smareglia's close friend, Carlo Sai.¹ Since the texts (mostly without authors' signatures) were mainly an anthology, consisting of parts from older articles and anecdotes adapted from Smareglia's life, these reviews have been of very little use. Furthermore, there are several other publications on Smareglia, written in a passionate and bombastic style, which refer more to the discussions that were provoked by Smareglia rather than containing any substantial information. Two examples are a short monograph by Gastone Zuccoli,² which in its foreword is declared by the author to be "For an ideal of justice!" (*Per un ideale di giustizia*) and "to the young Italians" (*ai giovani d'Italia*), and a short volume by Smareglia's son Ariberto.³

¹ For more on Carlo Sai see Personalia, Appendix A.

² Gastone Zuccoli 1923, *Antonio Smareglia: monografia sulle opere del maestro con note musicali illustrative*, 2nd ed., Trieste: Circolo Musicale Giuliano. This monograph seems to be the oldest review written about Smareglia during his life. Its best features are the examples of some of the opera's main leitmotifs.

³ Ariberto Smareglia 1926, *Il teatro lirico nazionale negli ultimi 30 anni: il 'Caso Smareglia' e il Teatro alla Scala*, Trieste: Libreria Minerva.

The following part of the text will give an overview of the literature which directly discusses Smareglia, or is related primarily to his last compositional period. The material has been divided into the following categories:

- i. Correspondence
- ii. Memoirs
- iii. Biographies
- iv. Critical reviews
- v. Modern studies.

Beginning with Smareglia's most personal and authentic documentation, which is represented in his letters, the sequence of sources moves through remembrances and testimonies of his closest companions, and further into journalism and more recent studies. Each of these sources makes its own contribution towards our knowledge of the composer.

i. Correspondence

Un mio amico inglese, il Prof. Joyce, diceva che tu saresti uno dei pochi uomini noti in questa provincia, dei quali si parlerebbe fra tanti anni. [Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 70]

[An English friend of mine, Prof. Joyce, used to say that you would be one of the few well-known men in this province, who would be talked about in many years' time.]

This comment, written by Smareglia's librettist Silvio Benco, is an example of the kind of information that can be found in the correspondence of Antonio Smareglia: important names, events and places but without the more detailed revelation of thoughts and feelings that is usually found in someone's letters.

This is certainly the case if we look at the published part of Smareglia's correspondence, which will be discussed further.⁴ In the course of this research, however, the author has been able to discover a whole series of unpublished letters. There is quite an astonishing number of them: in Trieste's archives and libraries alone there are several dozens of letters, most of which were written by Smareglia himself.⁵ Since most of them have never been researched or published, their condition is poor and only in some cases are they catalogued. Full examination of the unpublished part of the correspondence goes beyond the limits of this

⁴ See Antonio Smareglia 1974, *Lettere*, ed. by Gianni Gori and Isabella Gallo, Napoli: Edizioni dell'Ateneo.

⁵ Some letters are kept in the archive of Biblioteca Civica in Piacenza. These letters belong to the period during which Smareglia was working on *Nozze istriane* (1894-5), and was collaborating with Luigi Illica. Their texts suggest that the correspondence between the two artists covers a longer period, from *Nozze istriane* to 1905, and in some cases offer an insight into Smareglia's own aesthetic ideas and opinions on a wide range of topics (such as on Hanslick, Wagner, *verismo*, *Falena* and *Oceana*). It should be noted that they were kept for a long time in the private possession of Mario Morini, and were in 2000 given back to the public.

research. Nevertheless, since the preliminary inspection of some letters revealed fundamental information which directly relates to Smareglia's collaboration with Benco, the content of these letters has been referred to in the appropriate context. For example, a large number of them is discussed in Chapter IV, in the section which examines the modifications of the libretto of *Falena*. In addition, some of the more important letters are quoted in their entirety, in Appendix B of this thesis.

Apart from a few manuscript scores, Smareglia's only surviving papers are a series of his letters written to a number of correspondents in the later half of his life. In the published edition there is a selection of 87 letters, written from about 1900 until his death in 1929. Although the collection is relatively small, considering the fact that it extends over a period of 30 years, Smareglia's correspondence gives us the most immediate insight into the composer's personality, his contacts with the publishers and some of the important events in his career. One example is Smareglia's initial involvement in the completion of Boito's score of *Nerone*.⁶

Details found in these letters reveal that Smareglia was often abrupt and tactless in his communication (in particular towards the conductor Toscanini). The problem was that Smareglia was trying to control his own life and career, but could not himself write because he was blind. The fact that he had to dictate each letter to his friends or sons does not mean that he could not have formulated them in a more diplomatic way. It did, however, lead him to make each letter short and pragmatic, so that it does not provide us with any sort of valuable thoughts about his artistic *credo*, or about the dramaturgy of his operas.⁷ There is none of the extended and revealing dialogue that we find, for example, in the Verdi - Boito correspondence.⁸

Antonio Smareglia's most frequent correspondent was Silvio Benco. Although Benco summed up his close friendship with Smareglia in his *Ricordi*, only when reading his letters do we realise to what extent he was engaged with Smareglia's contacts, and even the composer's family problems. Several letters for example, mention health problems of the composer's wife, and of the possible breakdown which was threatening their marriage.⁹ What is strikingly repetitive in Benco's letters are his comments about the hostility which was constantly expressed during the performances of Smareglia's works in Trieste or Milan.

⁶ On Smareglia's involvement with the completion of Boito's score of *Nerone* see Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 72 and pp. 126 – 128. The issue is again discussed in section II. 2.

⁷ An exception may be found in the numerous unpublished letters, many of which will be discussed in this thesis. Within the published edition particularly useful are the three letters which discuss the changes in the versification of *Falena* (see *ibid.*, letter n. 13, 40 and 41). Fuller reference and examination of these changes are provided in Chapter IV of this thesis.

⁸ Marcello Conati and Mario Medici, eds., 1994, *The Verdi - Boito Correspondence*, trans. by William Weaver, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁹ See letters n. 2, 3, 5, 6, as well as numerous unpublished letters (within the group of letters catalogued as "Dono Elisa Tamburlini") kept in the archives of the Civico Museo Teatrale "Carlo Schmidl" in Trieste.

Benco referred to the members of the audiences attending as “the protestors to the opera”, “the organizers of the famous campaign”, or “your enemies”.¹⁰ An example of one anxious letter written to Smareglia appears below:

Non puoi credere quale sia la rabbia dei tuoi nemici per l'andata in scena di quest'opera. Hanno tentato coi mezzi più bassi e vili di terrorizzare l'impresa per farla togliere dal cartellone. [Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p.10].

[You cannot believe how angry your enemies are about the staging of this opera. They tried in the most base and vile manner to scare the management in order to have it withdrawn from the season programme.]

There are a few other details found in these letters which can rarely be read about elsewhere. In one letter Smareglia discusses an ambitious project involving the establishment of a publishing house with the help of Richard Wagner's son, Siegfried, with whom he had exchanged earlier correspondence.¹¹ In others we learn about the dispute which arose between Smareglia and Toscanini. From reading just a few letters it is not hard to conclude that the argument was caused mostly by Smareglia's impulsive, imprudent and tactless manner. An illustration of this is found in the letter in which Smareglia withdrew his dedication of *Abisso* to Toscanini, after the conductor had left out Smareglia's operas from La Scala's repertoire in 1925. After this incident Toscanini completely ignored the composer. The numerous letters exchanged by Smareglia with his friends, family or colleagues also assist us to draw up a list of *personalia* around him. Among others, there are names such as Luigi Illica, the Viennese music critic Max Kalbeck, Luigi Mancinelli and Arrigo Boito. More can be learnt about these artists in the memoir by Silvio Benco, *Ricordi di Antonio Smareglia*.

ii. *Memoirs*

Benco's *Ricordi di Antonio Smareglia* are perhaps the best literary portrait of the composer.¹² The reason why Benco could provide such an insight into Smareglia's character lies in the close collaboration between the two artists while creating the operas *La Falena*,

¹⁰ See letters n. 1, 34, 35, 36.

¹¹ See letter n. 12. The project failed due to Ricordi's exclusive rights for Wagner's opera performed in Italian (which he inherited from Lucca). However, similar ambitions were shared by other contemporaries of Smareglia (Mascagni for example), due to Ricordi's (and to an extent Sonzogno's) enormous power in the music publishing and control over the operatic repertoires in Italy. See Bianca Maria Antolini 1997, “L'editoria musicale in Italia negli anni di Puccini”, in *Giacomo Puccini: l'uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi su Giacomo Puccini nel 70 anniversario della morte*, ed. by G. Ravenni e C. Gianturco, Studi Musicali Toscani, 4, Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, pp. 354-355.

¹² Silvio Benco 1968, *Ricordi di Antonio Smareglia*, Trieste: Edizioni Umana. The original manuscript is kept in Biblioteca Civica “A. Hortis” in Trieste.

Oceana and *Abisso*. Their partnership and close friendship is even more important because both of them were at crucial moments of their career when they met: Smareglia in his last compositional phase, and Benco at a susceptible period during the early stages of his career as a journalist and writer.

Benco's *Ricordi*, which he wrote while in confinement in Austria in 1944, are his vivid memories of the cultural environment in and around Trieste, in which both he and Smareglia participated. In his flowing narration of "memories, chronicle fragments, anecdotes and ... perhaps indiscretions", Benco depicted the manner in which Smareglia's operas were created and performed throughout various stages of the composer's career.¹³ Although it never gives exact dates, from this source, along with the collection of the composer's letters, we are able to draw an account of important events and personalities around Smareglia which proves to be very useful. The value of Benco's publication is its authentic information on which we can rely when reconstructing Smareglia's life. Furthermore, by having engaged himself in something new such as the writing of libretti for Smareglia, in time Benco developed his own artistic beliefs. His enthusiasm for the themes typical of the fin-de-siècle (such as the world of dreams and eroticism), for the art of Wagner, D'Annunzio and Smareglia, as well as for the theatre and music in general, were expressed by Benco in his novels, in a collection of his *Musical Writings* and in a series of essays on art and literature.¹⁴ It is significant that Benco wrote his memoir of Smareglia about fifteen years after the composer's death. This period of reflection gave him another, more mature perspective on Italian opera at that time, allowing through his "analytical and conciliatory" tone of expression, the occasion to reflect upon Smareglia's feelings:¹⁵

Perché comporre? Aveva lì tante opere: ... tutte segnate di quanto era più eletto nella sua natura di musicista, tutte degne di stare a paro con le migliori musiche che si scrivessero in quel tempo: nessuno vi poneva attenzione ... Perché comporre?... Per il calcolo di un editore, il corto fiato d'un cantante, il malumore d'un giornalista, poteva essere stroncato ai primi passi, forse per sempre, anche il cammino d'un capolavoro. [Benco, *Ricordi*, pp. 118 – 9]

[Why compose? There he had many operas... impregnated with his best qualities as a musician, all worthy of standing alongside the best operas written at that time: nobody paid any attention to them ... Why compose? Because of a publisher's calculations, a singer's short breath, a journalist's bad temper. Even the path of a masterpiece could be cut short at its first steps.]

¹³ "[D]ei ricordi, dei brandelli di cronaca, degli aneddoti, e magari, ... delle indiscrezioni...", *ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁴ See Silvio Benco 1974, *Scritti musicali di Silvio Benco*, ed. by Gianni Gori and Isabella Gallo, Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore; Silvio Benco 1977, *Scritti di critica letteraria e figurativa*, ed. by Oliviero H. Bianchi, Bruno Maier and Sauro Pesante, Trieste: Edizioni Lint and also, Silvio Benco 1922, *La corsa del tempo*, ed. by Umberto Saba, 2nd ed., Trieste: Casa Editrice Parnaso.

¹⁵ This is how Benco's writing was viewed by a critic Remigio Marini in an article from *La Voce Libera*, 26 March 1949.

These sentiments expressed by Benco reveal his genuine appreciation for Smareglia's work and his sympathy and understanding of the difficult position he had been placed in. Benco felt a sense of outrage that Smareglia had been treated unfairly and was overlooked by publishers of the time. This is one of the major incentives for writing a thesis which will draw attention to the operas of Smareglia and will hopefully encourage others to reassess his work.

iii. Biographies

An even more in-depth account of Smareglia's personality and the personal and professional relationships he built during his life is provided by his sons in their biographies. Mario and Ariberto Smareglia each wrote a monograph on their father which are the only eye-witness and comprehensive studies of Smareglia.¹⁶ Although both of these publications are designed as studies of the composer within 19th-century Italian musical theatre, in their contents they complement one another: the detailed account of Smareglia's life and work given by Ariberto is complemented by Mario's collection of critical reviews and essays.

The main advantage of these studies is that they refer to a multitude of people and list all the events which involved Smareglia. In fact, Ariberto's work purports to be such an exhaustive biographical survey of Smareglia's life that, at times, one must be careful with its credibility.¹⁷ On the other hand, the diligently assembled articles and essays in Mario's publication give us an insight into the atmosphere at the premieres of Smareglia's operas as well as presenting the essays, rarely accessible in other publications, written by the composer himself.¹⁸

Another conspicuous feature of both volumes is their passionate and ardent manner of narration, for example the defensive tone in the forewords, with which the authors confronted the hostility that was directed towards the composer in Trieste around 1930. Mario Smareglia limited himself to a generalised discussion about Smareglia's "enemies", dealing more with what he called the "publisher's speculative and arbitrary acts" which

¹⁶ Mario Smareglia 1934, *Antonio Smareglia nella storia del teatro melodrammatico italiano dell'ottocento attraverso le critiche e scritti raccolti da Mario Smareglia*, Pola: Libreria Editrice Smareglia, and Ariberto Smareglia 1936, *Vita ed arte di Antonio Smareglia: un capitolo di storia del teatro lirico italiano*, 2nd ed., Bellinzona: Arturo Salvioni & co.

¹⁷ An example is Ariberto's account of Smareglia's audition to present his opera *Il Vassallo di Szigeth*, which took place in 1889 in Vienna, under the direction of Hans Richter. Apparently, Johannes Brahms had heard the general rehearsal and had commented to Richter: "Finally, you are performing an opera that deserves to be performed" (Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, pp. 44-45). Ariberto goes even further in recalling that event, mentioning that the young Richard Strauss was in the audience, applauding! Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support this anecdote either in the Brahms or Strauss' literature.

¹⁸ Among the writings by Smareglia are a few short reflections on Arrigo Boito, Hans Richter and Richard Strauss.

resulted in the unjust treatment of the composer during his life.¹⁹ On the other hand, Ariberto entitled his introduction, “Contribution to a Triestine debate” (*Per una polemica triestina*), shedding light on a campaign launched against Smareglia’s music by the *irredentisti*.²⁰ We learn that these campaigns had harmed the popularity of Smareglia’s art, and it is understandable why both of the authors feel indignant about critics of their father’s work. Nevertheless, the disadvantage of these family testimonies lies in their overcoloured interpretation of the episodes of Smareglia’s life as well as in their tendency to exaggerate in praising Smareglia’s musical contributions at the turn of the century.

iv. Critical reviews

The large number of articles dedicated to Smareglia in the newspapers can be divided into those written during Smareglia’s life, and the more recent reviews written mostly in the second half of the 20th century. The main difference between these two groups of reviews is in the issues they dealt with: while the older ones had a tendency to make critical judgements of Smareglia’s work, the more recent reviews emphasised the importance of the revival and reassessment of the composer’s music.

The premieres of the operas *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* were discussed in a large number of articles in newspapers such as *Il Secolo*, *La Perseveranza*, *La Lega Lombarda* and *Il Corriere della Sera*. The advantage of these reviews is that they reveal to us how much attention Smareglia’s music generated at the time, and provide an insight into how the performances were received by the public. At that time it was common practice to ‘judge’ public opinion by observing the way audiences behaved during a performance. The critics would count how many times the curtain was raised, how many times certain fragments from the opera were being repeated and how much mumbling was heard in the hall.²¹

In describing the performances, the authors debated Smareglia’s music, judging at the same time the behaviour of the audience that was present in the theatre. During the first staging of *Oceana* in 1903, for example, the Milanese were so bewildered that it took them a few days before they were confident enough to express their approval.²² The controversy that was generated by this performance resulted in fervent discussions which then contributed more

¹⁹ The publisher Mario Smareglia had in mind was Ricordi.

²⁰ At the turn of the century, *irredentismo* in the Trieste area (in Trentino and Venezia Giulia) was defined as an anti-Austrian movement. Although fundamentally of similar aspirations as the *Risorgimento*, *irredentismo* was often manipulated by the right wing nationalists who provoked conflicts with the Slavs of Dalmatia and Istria in particular. Since Smareglia was of mixed descent and had connections with the Austrian theatres, he was subject to attack through the newspaper *Il Popolo di Trieste*, and by the boycotting of his music.

²¹ See for example, Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 216-221.

²² The critical reception of *Oceana* is discussed in Chapter V.

to the popularity of this opera. In the case of *Oceana*, Smareglia's success was of a quite complex nature. What leaves us perplexed is not so much who was for or against Smareglia's music, but rather the way the critics formulated their opinions. In relation to *Oceana*'s premiere, one critic suggested that it was a *succès d'estime*, while another referred to "*oceanofobia*"²³ directed against the production.

Besides telling us about the staging of these three operas, the early reviews show that the critics were quite united in their agreement that Smareglia was a successful composer, in search of a new artistic form. Several of the critics felt that they needed to defend *Oceana* by explaining to the reader that Smareglia, starting with *Falena*, had adopted a 'new style': the Italian tradition of vocal and instrumental balance was changed to a style where the orchestral writing was given greater prominence. Furthermore, it was noticed that the composer was more inclined to evoke the mood of the drama rather than the drama itself, and had stepped away from the fashionable *verismo* operas of the time.²⁴ Even though the critic Agostino Cameroni for some reason wrote that Smareglia clashed with almost "all of the modern [operatic] school", he recognised that Smareglia's *Oceana* belonged to the "period in transition which Italian opera was going through".²⁵ This observation leads us to the more recent study of that period by Jay Nicolaisen, and will prove to be significant later on in this work.²⁶

Most recent critical reviews on Smareglia, covering the period of 1949 until 1989, were written either on the occasion of the productions of the operas *Oceana*, *Abisso* and *Falena*, or generally, for the anniversary of the composer's death. What they emphasise primarily is the long disregard for Smareglia and his music in Italian operatic theatres. In contrast to the old reviews written during Smareglia's life, the newer reviews written after his death contain little debate about the value of his music. In the opinion of Daniele Rubboli, for example, to stage Smareglia's operas nowadays is not something to be done out of respect for the past but out of the duty to inform, to have knowledge of and to present as yet another part of Italian musical culture.²⁷

Although the more recent articles were mainly dedicated to the performances of certain operas, they helped to clarify the opinions formed about the composer in the third quarter of the last century. For example, when in 1975 the theatre in Trieste staged *Falena*, the two eminent music critics, Fedele D'Amico and Paolo Isotta, went as far as proclaiming that

²³ Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 217, and the review by G. B. Nappi in *La Perseveranza*, *ibid.*, p. 228.

²⁴ See the articles in *ibid.*, p. 217, 222, 225 and 235.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

²⁶ Jay Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition*.

²⁷ "Sessant'anni dopo", in *L'Opera* 29, November 1989, pp. 60-62.

with this opera Smareglia opened a new period in Italian music.²⁸ This was confirmed with the composer's following opera, *Oceana*: D'Amico described it as "clearly a symphonic opera ... more lyrical and impressionistic than dramatic, ... the first opera (do you realise that?) of the Italian twentieth century."²⁹ The authors also attributed such an achievement to Smareglia's collaboration with his librettist Silvio Benco, who was primarily responsible for encouraging Smareglia to experiment with themes of Decadence. This fascination with Decadence was recognised by D'Amico when he commented that "In *Falena*, *scapigliatura* throws itself into D'Annunzio's arms."³⁰ This statement will be significant for Chapter IV of this study, dealing with *Falena* and the period of Decadence.

During the late 1970s, critics tended to describe Smareglia as an unusual composer whose musical expression was marked by German tendencies, and enriched with Slav colour. That is why there are comparisons with artists such as Dvorak, Smetana, Liszt or Strauss. It appears that having a multi-cultural background added a dosage of artistic complexity to the composer, and was regarded as one of the causes of the numerous vicissitudes in his career, and a certain solitude. Furthermore, cultural diversity may be partly to blame for Smareglia being set aside and labeled as "one of the most unfortunate composers".³¹ Nevertheless, most recent reviews show that commentaries on Smareglia's art have lately become more objective, with critics recognising his achievements in the context of the Italian opera of his time.

v. *Modern studies*

The relatively few writings about Smareglia during the second half of the 20th century became oriented towards more specialised studies of the composer's work. The writers started devoting their research to an investigation of Smareglia's operas individually, and to important aspects of his compositional style or his musical expression. Regarding the nature of the recent studies, we can distinguish the pamphlets or volumes published following a particular event, such as the Conference held on Antonio Smareglia in 1991 in Trieste,³² and

²⁸ See the articles by Paolo Isotta, "Una *Falena* impressionante" in *Il Giornale*, 21 March 1975, and Fedele D'Amico, "Nelle braccia di D'Annunzio", in *L'Espresso*, 30 March 1975.

²⁹ D'Amico, "Nelle braccia di D'Annunzio". A more elaborated version of Isotta's article on *Falena*, entitled "Il demonio istriano", can be found in the collection of his essays and articles, see Isotta 1978, *I sentieri della musica*, Milan: Mondadori editore. This article is discussed in Chapter IV.

³⁰ D'Amico, "Nelle braccia di D'Annunzio". For more on D'Annunzio and the period of Decadence, see Chapter IV. 3.

³¹ By Isotta, "Il fascino malato dell'*Abisso*", in *Il Giornale*, 6 February 1979.

³² Such is the 1991 edition of *Atti del convegno di studi su Antonio Smareglia*. Milano: Casa Musicale Sonzogno. The Conference was held on the occasion of the performance of *Pittori fiamminghi* in Trieste in 1991. Among the speakers were Fedele D'Amico, Rubens Tedeschi, Gianni Gori and Smareglia's granddaughter, Adua Luciana Rigotti Smareglia.

research of an academic kind. Although the contribution of modern studies has been relatively modest, several authors have been particularly helpful in this study of Smareglia's last three operas.

One such work, dating from 1949, is *Oceana di Antonio Smareglia: piccola guida attraverso l'opera*, written by Smareglia's pupil, Vito Levi. The occasion was special: the staging of *Oceana* in Trieste during that year occurred forty six years after its premiere at La Scala. The fact that for such a purpose a guide had been published indicates the importance given to the event, and suggests that there was a call for a reassessment of the composer's work. As a detailed commentary on *Oceana*, on its "destiny" and the opera's musico-dramatic structure, this guide has proved to be useful for profiling *Oceana's* particularities in Chapter V of this dissertation.³³

Levi's enthusiastic engagement with Smareglia's musical theatre gave an incentive to Eduardo Perpich, Levi's student, who graduated at Trieste University in 1959/1960, to study Smareglia.³⁴ According to Levi's writing in the preface to Perpich's thesis, this work was the first all-embracing study of Smareglia's operas. To a certain extent this acknowledgement of Perpich's study is correct. His publication provides an overview of numerous aspects of Smareglia's life and career, including issues such as the composer's critical fortune, his cultural background and the main characteristics of his musical language. Perpich discusses, although not extensively, the three individual stages of Smareglia's operatic career. His book offers a possibility to consult, for example, numerous critical reviews of both Smareglia's 'Austrian period' while he resided in Vienna (including the opinions written by Eduard Hanslick and Max Kalbeck), as well as the 'Italian period' (from 1895 onwards). In addition, it contains a selection of the main musical ideas from the last six of Smareglia's operas. The advantage Perpich had was that he could actually attend the performances of *Oceana* and *Nozze istriane* in the late 1940s. Still, his study lacks new perspectives on Smareglia's work. His discussions often reiterate the same material. For example, a direct influence on Perpich's text came from Levi, in particular his discussion of the artistic atmosphere at the turn of the century, or indeed of *Oceana* itself.³⁵ Nevertheless, Perpich's writing does provide an invaluable introduction to all of Smareglia's operas.

The strong contrast between Smareglia's operas, *Nozze istriane* and *Oceana*, had attracted another scholar, Flavia Verzini, who wrote a dissertation entitled *Punti estremi del teatro*

³³ See Chapter V.

³⁴ See Edoardo Perpich 1990, *Il teatro musicale di Antonio Smareglia*. Collana degli atti del Centro di Ricerche Storiche di Rovigno, 9. Trieste - Rovigno: Unione degli italiani dell'Istria – Università Popolare di Trieste.

³⁵ Perpich assimilated Levi's judgements often without mentioning the source. Compare, for example the top of p. 41 of his study (in which he mentions Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*) with Vito Levi's reference to the same opera in his *Oceana di Antonio Smareglia*, p. 8.

musicale di Antonio Smareglia, in 1982. The two operas had completely opposite aesthetics. What proves to be most interesting in this study is the emphasis given by the author, in the case of *Oceana*, to the predominance of music over the drama, or even over the text itself. Verzini's opinion that, in this opera, the "word is swallowed up in the symphonic texture, becoming music itself" will prove to be relevant later in this thesis, when discussing Smareglia's response to Benco's libretto.³⁶

Brief attention should be given to the most recent articles. Giuliana Novel's "'Visione musicalissima' e 'simbolo pittorico': *La Falena* di Silvio Benco e Antonio Smareglia", offers a more detailed discussion of certain relevant features of the opera, such as the elements of Symbolism.³⁷ One particular contribution of this article lies in the Appendix, which includes some of the unpublished letters written by the composer. This thesis frequently refers to the content of these letters.

Two very illuminating essays have been published in the last five years by the Triestine musicologist Ivano Cavallini. The significance of Cavallini's research transpires from the titles of the articles: "*La musica di tre culture, tre culture per una musica: appunti in luogo di premessa*" and "*La frontiera interiore di Antonio Smareglia*".³⁸ Both articles, the second in particular, elaborately discuss the multicultural background of the composer and how it influenced his open-minded and cosmopolitan spirit. Cavallini questions whether Smareglia should be considered an "authentic Italian" composer, because the elements of three cultures fused together in his artistic sensibility and enriched his musical language. Cavallini's references to Trieste as being a "city with two souls, Italian and Slav", "ambiguous and malicious", a "place of bewilderment for its inhabitants" further points out the difficulty one encounters when defining Smareglia's sense of cultural belonging and his compositional style. The elements of "German Romanticism", "Italian temperament" and "Slav sweetness" (or softness) in his operas were interpreted by the Austrian critics for example, as of someone who is *outside* the "young Italian school" group of composers (Cavallini 1995: 245). Although Smareglia's music does differ to an extent from that of Mascagni or Leoncavallo, his membership of the "young Italian school" is indisputable. This thesis sustains the view that Smareglia was an Italian composer who, as Waterhouse remarked,

³⁶ Flavia Verzini 1985, "Punti estremi del teatro musicale di Antonio Smareglia", University of Bologna graduation thesis, p. 94.

³⁷ Giuliana Novel 1999, "'Visione musicalissima' e 'simbolo pittorico': *La Falena* di Silvio Benco e Antonio Smareglia", in *Cosmopolitismo e nazionalismo nella musica a Trieste tra ottocento e novecento: studi offerti a Vito Levi*, ed. by Ivano Cavallini e Paolo Da Col. Quaderni del Conservatorio "G. Tartini" di Trieste. Trieste: University of Trieste, pp. 17 – 65.

³⁸ See Ivano Cavallini 1995, "*La frontiera interiore di Antonio Smareglia*", in *Atti 25*. Rovigno: Centro di ricerche storiche, Unione Italiana Fiume and Università popolare Trieste, pp. 241-264; also Ivano Cavallini 1999, "*La musica di tre culture, tre culture per una musica: appunti in luogo di premessa*", in *Cosmopolitismo e nazionalismo nella musica a Trieste tra ottocento e novecento: studi offerti a Vito Levi*, ed. by Ivano Cavallini e Paolo Da Col. Quaderni del Conservatorio "G. Tartini" di Trieste. Trieste: University of Trieste, pp. 5-15.

considering the social and cultural context of the time, inevitably *became* an outsider. Smareglia, similarly to Catalani, suffered from “neglect and alienation” in the society around him, and “sought refuge in a rather decadent ‘escapist romanticism’” (Waterhouse 1968: 124). As will be further discussed, Smareglia proved with his last three operas to have belonged to the lesser known, or less popular tendency of Italian operatic theatre. Together with Benco he shared the aspirations to renew Italian opera by believing in and reaching for different means.

It is significant to mention the author’s dissertation on Smareglia’s opera *Nozze istriane*. Prompted by the existence of the composer’s original manuscript, held in the University Library in Pola, the research of Smareglia’s most popular opera stands as the stepping stone towards the author’s interest in the late period of Smareglia’s work.³⁹

The image of Smareglia, which we can gather from the selected literature, is of someone who does not yet have a deserved place in operatic history. The aim of this thesis is to draw attention to three of his invaluable operas and the unique contribution they made.

II. 2 Cultural biography

The following cultural biography is intended to give an insight into the life and work of Antonio Smareglia. There are two reasons for combining the composer’s biography with a discussion of the panorama of operatic repertory in Italy at the turn of the century. Firstly, it is impossible to understand Smareglia’s work without understanding his background, including his musical education. As with most artists, Smareglia’s work was heavily influenced by his life experiences. In order to understand some of the turning-points of his career, one must appreciate that he was in conflict with the most powerful Italian publisher at the time, and even more importantly, that he went blind at the age of forty-six. Secondly, Smareglia’s operas were being performed alongside many others and featured in the repertory in Italy from 1875. An appreciation of the operatic scene at the time and the work of his contemporaries will deepen our understanding of Smareglia himself.

Since this thesis focuses on Smareglia’s last three operas, the cultural biography will end with the premiere of *Abisso* (Milan 1914). For the decade which followed until his death, on

³⁹ See Juliana Licinic 1992, “Antonio Smareglia i njegova opera *Nozze istriane*” [Antonio Smareglia and his opera *Nozze istriane*], University of Zagreb graduation thesis. The thesis was published in 1995, in *Arti Musices* 26/2, pp. 175 – 215.

15 April 1929, Smareglia faced difficulty both in his professional and personal life: his operas were rarely performed, he lived in extremely poor conditions, and he saw the loss of his wife. There is a danger that, by concentrating on this dark period, the reader could be led to feel pity for Smareglia, rather than focusing on his achievements.⁴⁰ Other writers, publishing work on Smareglia in the 1970s have fallen into this trap.⁴¹ A more interesting episode from that period is Smareglia's encounter, in 1923, with Carlo Sai, a wealthy industrialist from Trieste who admired his music and did everything he could to help promote it.⁴² In fact, Sai went as far as opening a publishing house, Casa Musicale Giuliana, and establishing a journal called *Cronache d'arte*, which every few months had a special supplement, *Cronache Smaregliane*.⁴³ The only problem was that Sai did not have the requisite experience in music and theatre so that his ventures in this arena were not as profitable as his other business; his efforts soon failed in the 1930s.

The following text is divided into five principal sections:

- i. Childhood in Istria
- ii. Early Viennese years
- iii. Operatic life in Milan during Smareglia's study years
- iv. Viennese years (1887 - 1893)
- v. Turn of the century: Pola, Venice, Milan, Trieste (1894 - 1914).

Each section guides us through certain phases of Smareglia's career, mentioning the vicissitudes of his life, and depicting what it was like to be an opera composer in Italy at the turn of the century, particularly when one had a multi-cultural background as Smareglia did.⁴⁴ Although it can be argued that having parents with different nationalities enhanced Smareglia's creativity, this did not always prove to be advantageous throughout his career. He was, for example, asked to change the Slav character Luze in the opera *Nozze istriane*

⁴⁰ In the period during and after the First World War Smareglia's operas were often boycotted by the Triestine nationalists. An account of this phase of Smareglia's life can be found in his son's writings, see Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, and Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*.

⁴¹ The attitude of various critics who thought of Smareglia as a "poor and miserable composer" has, in my view, more damaged the image of the composer than helped in reviving his work. This assumption is based on the content of a letter written by Smareglia to Benco in which the composer reacted furiously to the lamentable tone of Benco's comments when the poet spoke of him (in an article on Toscanini, cf. Silvio Benco, *Scritti musicali*, pp. 104-105). To quote Smareglia: "Mi hanno però irritato assai le poche parole che mi riguardano: che sia proprio tu quello che mi estende certificati di mendicizia e miserabilità umilianti, avviliti e dannosi è cosa per me la più urtante e spiacevole. Bisogna mancare di senso comune per scrivere 'il povero musicista al quale tutti hanno chiuso le porte'. A simili esclamazioni preferisco un laccio al collo...". [Those few words which regarded me irritated me: I am regretful and annoyed that it is you who refers to me with words such as beggary and humiliating misery, which are disgraceful and damaging. One has to lack common sense to write 'a poor musician to whom everyone has closed the doors'. I prefer a noose round my neck than exclamations of this kind...], from letter n. B. C. 1262, see Novel, " 'Visione musicalissima' ", p. 58. The examples of such views are numerous and can be gathered from a majority of critical reviews or studies on the composer. Cf. for example Isotta's expression, p. 27 para. 2.

⁴² For Carlo Sai, see *Personalia*, Appendix A.

⁴³ Cf. the discussion on p. 19 para. 2 of this Chapter.

⁴⁴ Smareglia had an Italian father and a Croatian mother.

(Trieste 1895) at the time when irredentism was at its peak in Trieste.⁴⁵ As will be seen, Smareglia had resisted these solicitations, upholding his cosmopolitan spirit and turning it to his advantage by earning most flattering appraisals as a *sinfonista* of Wagner's or Strauss's rank. However, it becomes apparent that his cosmopolitanism exerted a considerable influence on his fate, both positively and negatively.

i. Childhood in Istria

Antonio Smareglia was born on 5 May 1854 in Pola [Pula].⁴⁶ A large naval harbour on the north Adriatic peninsula of Istria, Pola was at the time, along with the larger part of the region, under Austrian dominion. His father, Francesco Smareglia, was an Italian, originally from a small village of Dignano. His mother, Julia Stiglic, was a Croatian from Lovran, a town on the north-east coast of Istria. We know little about Smareglia's childhood years, except that he was sent to more than four different schools in order to gain basic education. As the sixth child born to parents whose first five offspring died, Smareglia earned a reputation of being an undisciplined and slightly indolent pupil. His first experience with music was through his father, who played what seems to be the bass horn (*flipcornò basso*) in the local band (*banda cittadina*). From Ariberto Smareglia's accounts, we learn that Antonio Smareglia soon started to play the instrument himself, finding inspiration in the melodies he would have heard the band play: excerpts from Verdi operas *Attila*, *I due Foscari* and *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* (Ariberto Smareglia 1936: 20). According to Ariberto, Smareglia's mother played a significant role by singing Slav songs to him, which then influenced his vocal writing. Through this close bond with his mother, the Slav culture she instilled in him became central to his imagination, thereby permeating much of his lyricism with a 'Slavic colour'.⁴⁷

ii. Early Viennese years

Smareglia's musical education began informally while he was a teenager living in Austria in the late 1860s. He attended numerous concerts and opera performances in Vienna and Graz,

⁴⁵ The composer recalls how the character of Luze, whose musical expression was inspired from his mother's singing, was needed in order to provide a dramatic contrast in the opera. See Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 305.

⁴⁶ Nowadays a Croatian town of 70 000 inhabitants, at the time when Smareglia was born Pula was under the Austrian Empire, and was referred to by its Latin name, Pola. To avoid confusion this name will be used throughout this thesis.

⁴⁷ In his short article "Come nascono le melodie?", Smareglia recalls his childhood and the times when his mother sang him melodies and lullabies which left unforgettable memories. See Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 305.

but very little is known about his life at the time. He was initially sent by his parents to complete his secondary education, specialising in mathematics, but never managed to do so either in Vienna or in Graz at the Polytechnic school. From what the biographies say, Smareglia was soon completely fascinated by Vienna's musical life, and as a result neglected his school studies. What we know for certain is that Smareglia attended the performances at the most important theatre in Vienna, the Hofoper (Court opera), which at the time was being transferred from the Kärntnertortheater into the new, more modern opera house on the Ringstrasse.

Although it is difficult to know exactly what the sixteen-year-old Smareglia could have heard while living in Austria, several events are repeatedly mentioned in his biographies. Of the many Italian, French and German operas of the repertory, those which affected Smareglia the most were the works of Wagner, notably *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* which he heard in Vienna in 1870,⁴⁸ and Mozart, whose opera *Don Giovanni* he attended at the official opening of the new Court Opera house in 1869.⁴⁹ The Court opera was at the time directed by Franz von Dingelstedt (1867 - 1870). Although he was unpopular and thought of opera as a “necessary evil” (Prawy 1969: 32), he had still introduced some positive changes, such as augmenting the orchestra and taking more care of stage settings. His successor was Johann Herbeck (1870 - 1875), at the time “Vienna's most popular conductor”, famous for having conducted Vienna's first performance of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1870), Verdi's *Aida* (1874), Goldmark's *Die Königin von Saba* (1875) and male voice choir concerts which included several choruses from Wagner's operas such as *Tannhäuser*, *Der Fliegende Holländer* and *Rienzi* (Prawy 1969: 33).

Without a doubt, the time spent in Vienna was decisive for Smareglia's career. Not only had he failed to complete the last year of secondary school, but when he left Vienna for Graz, instead of studying to re-sit his exams he started taking piano lessons. Following a concert at which Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* was played, Smareglia decided to change his course of study. Absorbed in the music which he had heard, and particularly the music of Wagner, by September 1871 he was on his way to Milan to become a composer.

⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that, at the Vienna's premiere of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, there were conflicts in the audience among the Wagnerians and anti-Wagnerians; at one point, the conductor Johann Herbeck had to sing the part of Hans Sachs himself because the main singer was too upset. See Marcel Prawy 1969, *The Vienna Opera*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 33.

⁴⁹ A description is found in Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, pp. 22-24.

iii. Operatic life in Milan during Smareglia's study years

In his comprehensive volume on the repertory of Milan's Teatro alla Scala, which covers the period from 1778 until 1968, Carlo Gatti described the 1870s as the years of "the confrontation of Italian and German music."⁵⁰ One of most significant years was 1872 during which there was a confrontation involving the music of Verdi (the Italian premiere of *Aida*) and of Wagner. As Kimbell noted, until then, "... in Italy no theatre ventured to perform any work of Wagner's. ... Wagnerism was essentially a theoretical and philosophical matter, at best fleshed out with some acquaintance with the published vocal scores" (Kimbell 1991: 577).⁵¹ It was in 1868 that Giovannina Lucca went to Lucerne to visit Wagner in order to negotiate for her firm the exclusive rights to his scores (Carner 1992: 36). Shortly after, Wagner's music was introduced in Italy with the famous and successful production of *Lohengrin* in Bologna in 1871. However, it still awaited a hearing at La Scala in 1873, under the special surveillance of Ricordi. While La Scala's audience welcomed Verdi's latest international achievement with enthusiasm, its reception of the music of Wagner was not as warm. Since Ricordi himself was no Wagner fan, he encouraged the hostile response and suspended the performances after the seventh evening. This was despite the fact that the *scapigliato* conductor, Franco Faccio, had wanted to "cultivate the audience's musical conscience" (Gatti 1964, 1: 144). Not only was the Milan premiere of Wagner's *Lohengrin* a "*fiasco solenne*", but after the premiere nobody would hear Wagner's music at La Scala for the next fifteen years.⁵²

The premieres of Smareglia's early operas also took place in Milan (with the exception of *Re Nala*, Venice 1887) in the 1870s and early 1880s. In fact, Smareglia's first 'appearance' at La Scala was in 1873, but not as a composer. At the turbulent premiere of *Lohengrin*, as an eighteen-year-old student from the Milan Conservatory, Smareglia fervently participated in a physical fight against the anti-Wagnerians. Since those who supported Wagner at the time were seen to be opposing Verdi, he soon gained a reputation for being an "enemy of Italian music" which followed him for every Italian appearance he was to make in his career.⁵³

⁵⁰ The subtitle to this section is: "Musica italiana e musica tedesca a raffronto: Nazionalismi musicali esasperati", see Carlo Gatti 1964, *Il teatro alla Scala nella storia e nell'arte: 1778 - 1963*, 2 vols., Milan: G. Ricordi, vol. 1, p. 141.

⁵¹ It was Abramo Basevi who in 1856 first wrote about Wagner in Italy, in a series of articles in the journal *L'armonia*. See David Kimbell 1991, *Italian Opera*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 576.

⁵² Gatti pointed out that Faccio conducted *Lohengrin* at La Scala again in 1888, only a year after Verdi's *Otello*: "Faccio si è affrettato a rimettere [*Lohengrin*] a confronto con l'*Otello*", in Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala*, vol. 1, p. 158. For more on *scapigliatura* see Chapter IV. 3 and pp. 34-36 *passim* in this Chapter.

⁵³ See, for example, the critical review written by Giulio Ricordi on the premiere of *Preziosa* in *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, quoted in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 125-128.

Throughout the second half of the 19th century Wagner remained in Italy “the most discussed of all foreign composers” (Budden 1992, 3: 271); both before and after he had actually been performed in the country. The discussions *pro* and *contra* Verdi or Wagner involved for the most part the young generation of composers, the *scapigliati*, whose desire for the renewal of Italian opera was seen, by Giulio Ricordi, for example, questionable if it was to follow a “‘preconceived’ (for which read ‘Wagnerian’) theory of opera” (Budden 1987: 301). In a certain way, the *scapigliati* were already labeled as Wagnerians: in a letter to Clara Maffei, back in 1863, Verdi referred Boito and Faccio as those “accused of being very warm admirers of Wagner...” (Conati 1994: xviii). Boito was again accused of being an absolute Wagnerian several years later, on the occasion of the premiere of his *Mefistofele* (1868) at La Scala; it was remembered as an “evening of an indescribable turmoil”.⁵⁴ Gatti suspected that “his enemies (he has too many of them) want to make him pay for his arrogant behaviour, which offends and irritates them”.⁵⁵ The problem was that the rebellious *scapigliati*, as Gatti remarked, wanted to “renew the art of our theatre ... as if there were no Verdi to be considered”.⁵⁶

Among the *scapigliati* who lived and worked in Milan at the time was the young poet and dramatist, Ferdinando Fontana. His involvement in the operatic theatre began during the 1880s, while writing the libretti for Puccini’s first operas *Le Villi* (1884) and *Edgar* (1889). Despite the fact that these libretti met with negative reactions and were the only Puccini ones to fail, Fontana continued writing libretti which heavily drew upon gothic subjects, reflecting the revival of medieval themes and the literary aspirations of the *scapigliatura* circle.⁵⁷ Far more significant is Fontana’s aesthetic view of musical theatre which he set forth in the essay *Il teatro* in 1884. An illustration of his opinion is set out in the following paragraph:

Il melodramma tende a trasformarsi in poema sinfonico scenico, tende a diventare cioè uno spettacolo, teatrale sì, ma nel quale la teatralità non dovrà avere il sopravvento sull’arte, bensì questa su quella; lo spettacolo musicale, insomma, tende a diventare sinfonico per eccellenza, cioè a sagomare sulla forma migliore dell’arte musicale, la sinfonia, il resto dello spettacolo. Questo spettacolo potrà essere adunque di due specie: lo spettacolo *sinfonico fantastico* e lo spettacolo *sinfonico scenico*.[...] Il secondo sarà la sublimazione del melodramma odierno; sarà, cioè, una

⁵⁴ “Serata di tumulto indescrivibile”, Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala*, vol. 1, p. 103.

⁵⁵ “Gli avversari (ne ha fin troppi e irrudicibili) gli vogliono far pagar cara la sua aria di superiorità che li offende e irrita”, *ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

⁵⁶ “Ambiscono codesti giovani di rinnovare l’arte di teatro nostra, ...combattendo in nome dell’avvenire dell’arte italiana come se Verdi non ci fosse da tenere in conto”, *ibid.*, 1, p. 103.

⁵⁷ The libretti of Ferdinando Fontana (Milan 1850 – Lugano 1919) for other composers include those of Franchetti (*Asrael*, 1888, *Il signor di Pourceaugnac*, 1897) of Samaras (*Flora mirabilis*, 1886, *Lionella*, 1891) and many for lesser composers (Mapelli’s *Anna e Gualberto*, 1884; Radeaglia’s *Colomba*, 1887; Latuada’s *Sandha*, 1924).

vasta sinfonia ogni parte della quale si foggierà ad un Atto, ma che avvolgerà come un soffio circolare, tutti gli sviluppi dell'azione, abolendo le vecchie consuetudini, cancellando il vecchio disegno, adoperando le decorazioni e i cantori come adopera un flauto o un violoncello in orchestra. Il *libretto* scomparirà; allo spettatore non verrà dato nelle mani che un vero poema perché questo gli possa servire di guida attraverso l'azione.

[Opera aims at transforming itself into a symphonic stage poem, aims to become a performance, admittedly theatrical, but in which the theatrical element must not dominate the art; on the contrary. The musical performance, in fact, aims to become symphonic par excellence, that is, to assimilate whatever remains of theatrical performance to that highest of musical forms, the symphony. This spectacle can be therefore of two kinds: the presentation of *symphonic fantasy* and the presentation of *symphonic theatre*.[...] The latter will be the sublimation of modern opera; it will be, that is, a vast symphony, every part of which will form themselves into an Act, but which will take into the cycle of a single breath all the developments of the plot, abolishing the old habits, canceling the old formula, using the scenery and the singers as it would a flute or a violoncello in an orchestra. The *libretto* will disappear; instead the spectator will not get in his hands anything but a true poem which can serve him as a guide through the plot.]

Announcing the idea of renewing Italian opera by creating the “symphonic stage poem”, Fontana’s words seem to prefigure the style of Italian opera which would be developed by the end of the century.⁵⁸

To return to Verdi. As Marcello Conati wrote in the introduction to the Verdi-Boito correspondence, Verdi was well aware of the contemporary *avveniristi* and of the admiration for Wagner that was spreading through Italy in the 1870s. On some occasions, if he was particularly provoked, as when in 1865 Tito Ricordi confessed to him his fear of the arrival of Wagner’s music in Italy, Verdi angrily burst out: “I have always loved and desired progress... I too want the music of the future; that is, I believe in a music for the future...” (Conati 1994: xxvi). However, he was saddened that for the young generation to be progressive they had to be Wagnerian, and he firmly objected to the suggestion by critics that he wrote Wagnerian music. An early example dates from 1867, when the premiere of *Don Carlos* took place in Paris. Accused by the critics of being a Wagnerian,⁵⁹ Verdi remarked: “I am an almost perfect Wagnerian. But if the critics had paid a bit more attention they would have noticed that the same kind of ideas are present in the *terzetto* from *Ernani*, in the sleepwalking scene from *Macbeth* and in so many other pieces ... But the point is not

⁵⁸ The revival of gothic themes in Italian opera is discussed in the article by Letizia Putignano 1994, “Revival gotico e misticismo leggendario nel melodramma italiano postunitario”, in *Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana* 1 (Jan-March), pp. 441-435.

⁵⁹ Such an accusation, for example, came from Bizet. See Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, p. 559.

whether *Don Carlos* belongs to this or that system but whether the music is good or bad” (Budden 1992, 3: 26).

However, Verdi still dominated the Italian opera in the 1870s and 1880s. It was not only that the repertory of La Scala, year by year, consisted largely of his works, but the success of *Aida* further inspired a preference for the grand opera genre during the 1870s. In that decade the repertory also included frequent revivals of French grand and lyrical operas by Meyerbeer (*Robert le diable*, *Les Huguenots*, *Dinorah*, *L'Africaine*, *Le prophète*), and Gounod (*Faust*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Cinq mars*).⁶⁰

The only new Italian contributions to the La Scala repertory at that time (except for Verdi's *Aida*, and few minor composers' works) were by Antonio Gomes (*Il Guarany* 1870, *Fosca* 1873, *Maria Tudor* 1879) and Amilcare Ponchielli (*I Lituani* 1874, *La Gioconda* 1876). Ponchielli and Gomes were both respected and encouraged by Giulio Ricordi, and had several operas commissioned by him (such as Ponchielli's *I Lituani*, 1874). For the history of Italian opera they remained important as composers whose work aspired to reconcile the old (grand opera) and new (bolder harmonic and orchestral texture), marking the transitional period between Verdi and “the young Italian school”. Ponchielli was “the first Italian composer of opera to show, from the start of his career, a mastery of modern instrumentation” (Kimbell 1991: 566). His gift for evoking dramatic atmosphere enabled him to encourage the same qualities in the younger generation of composers through his teaching at the Milan Conservatory (from 1881). Ponchielli's most talented student was Giacomo Puccini.

The first new composers to emerge at this time were Alfredo Catalani and Antonio Smareglia. There are many similarities between the careers of the two composers. Born in 1854, they were educated at the Milan Conservatory and were considered to be the most promising composers, following the performances of their graduating compositions in 1875, two one-act eclogues (Catalani's *La falce*; Smareglia's *Caccia lontana*). Their early operas had successful debuts at La Scala in 1882 (Smareglia's *Bianca da Cervia*) and 1883 (Catalani's *Dejanice*). Quite early in their careers, they were taken under the protective wing of Giovannina Lucca. However, the security of her publishing house soon disappeared when Ricordi took over Lucca (1888), forcing Catalani and Smareglia to come to terms as best as they could with his power and his indifference towards them. For both men, life in Milan was directly associated with the *scapigliatura*, and each one could be described with the words Kimbell used for Catalani: as “out of step with the taste of the times”, and a

⁶⁰ A useful repertory list of the most popular operas in Italy's major opera houses can be found in Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition*, Appendix I.

“belated *scapigliato*, a dreamer and idealist totally at a loss in the new world of *verismo*”.⁶¹ Both had surely seen or heard about the premieres of *Aida* and *Lohengrin*, and were encouraged by their teachers, Franco Faccio (in the case of Smareglia) and Bazzini (for Catalani) to adopt a more descriptive, “symphonic way of thinking” (Budden 1992, 3: 270). Their admiration of Wagner was at first reflected in the choice of subjects: northern myths and settings which allowed atmospheric tone-painting can be seen, for example, in all of Catalani’s operas except for *Dejanice* (Budden 1991, 3: 274). Smareglia’s case was somewhat more complex. Given his enthusiasm for Wagner, which he publicly expressed when he became involved in defending *Lohengrin* at its premiere in Milan, it seems that during his formative years, like Boito and Faccio, Smareglia spoke more about his admiration for Wagner, while his music remained strongly under the influence of Verdi.

Although Smareglia later in his life discarded his early operas (calling them the “sins of his youth”),⁶² it is with these works that he gained some popularity and the reputation of a promising composer; in particular with the first of the three operas which were written while he lived in Milan in the years before 1886. Smareglia first introduced himself to the Milanese audience with *Preziosa*, the premiere of which took place at the Teatro dal Verme in 1879. This, his first full-length opera, as well as *Bianca da Cervia* (La Scala 1882) which followed it, received positive criticism and one could almost imagine that the reason for this success was because they were not Wagnerian at all.⁶³ Smareglia’s melody was seen as “simple and fresh”, but more importantly, what was vital for the composer was that it attracted the attention of the publisher Lucca, the true rival of Ricordi in the 1870s. “The battle-axe woman” (*donna battagliera*), as Gatti called her, was known for supporting the “most prominent and modern composers, Italian and foreign, young talents who were open to the new tendencies in musical theatres in Italy and abroad”.⁶⁴ Smareglia’s early success with *Preziosa* not only encouraged Lucca to commission the next opera, but it inspired a memorable caricature of the time, published by the *Gazzetta dei Teatri*.⁶⁵

The early period of Smareglia’s career did not end in the promising way in which it began – quite the contrary. After the premiere of the opera *Re Nala*⁶⁶ which failed at La Fenice in

⁶¹ See Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, pp. 584-585.

⁶² When in 1922 the firm Ricordi asked Smareglia for a permission to send off the score of *Bianca di Cervia* for a performance in his native city, the composer did not allow it. See Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 56.

⁶³ Smareglia had surprised the audience and the critics. Antonio Gramola wrote that, after he had written his student work, the symphonic poem *Leonora*, one would have expected that Smareglia would reflect more of a Wagnerian influence, “but, instead, his *Preziosa* is anything but Wagnerian” (“ma invece, la sua *Preziosa* è tutt’altro che wagneriana”, see Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 129).

⁶⁴ The full quotation is as follows: “... i più reputati compositori moderni nostri e stranieri e i giovani di vigoroso e rigoglioso ingegno attratti dalle nuove tendenze della musica di teatro in Italia e fuori.” See Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala*, vol. I, p. 141.

⁶⁵ See Illustration n. 18. The caricature is mentioned in Mosco Carner, *Puccini*, p. 36.

⁶⁶ Libretto by V. Valle, after D. Gubernatis’s novel *Il ritorno*.

Venice in 1887, Smareglia burnt his score and left Italy.⁶⁷ By that year, from what we are told in the biographies written by his two sons, the relationship between him and the publisher Giulio Ricordi, never really cordial, broke down completely.⁶⁸ That was surely the reason for the decision to stage *Re Nala* in the Venetian theatre. Smareglia's failure or frustration may be explained, at least in part, by the fact that his opera took place only four days after Verdi's *Otello* at La Scala, a performance which took all the attention of the press. While his colleagues, Catalani and Puccini, continued to "adapt themselves to the changing tastes of the times" (Budden 1992, 3: 281), gradually emancipating their musical styles, Smareglia evidently decided that he would take a different path and sought alternatives in Vienna.

iv. Viennese years (1887-1893)

Before going to Vienna in 1887, Smareglia first went to his home town in Istria. He provided himself with a libretto for his next work, *Il Vassallo di Szigeth*, written by his Milanese friends, Francesco Pozza and Luigi Illica. It is not clear how long Smareglia stayed in Pola, but it was probably only a year. His son Ariberto noted that, while working on his next opera, Smareglia briefly became involved in Pola's political activities, being influenced by friends such as Matko Laginja, the leader of the Croatian party at the time.⁶⁹ He also met young Franz Lehár, who was the conductor of the local military band, and who was encouraged by Smareglia to undertake a musical career. It would be decades later (in 1908) that Smareglia and Lehár would meet again while Smareglia was visiting Vienna briefly. By that time Lehár was influential enough to be in a position to include Smareglia's *Nozze istriane* in the repertory of the Vienna Volksoper,⁷⁰ the theatre which opened in 1898 and was known for being "more enterprising and adventurous in the choice of new operas" than

⁶⁷ Opinions regarding the reception of *Re Nala* are controversial. Most biographical writings on Smareglia mention this event as the only real failure in Smareglia's career. However, Ippolito Valetta (in his article on the composer and the opera *Falena*), recalled *Re Nala*'s premiere as "un altro bel successo". Cf. Ippolito Valetta 1929, *Antonio Smareglia e La Falena*. 2nd ed., Trieste: Anonima Libreria Italiana, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Ariberto Smareglia recalled an episode from 1885: "Smareglia già nel 1885 avvertì le prime avvisaglie dell'ostilità editoriale contro la sua produzione: in quell'anno Franco Faccio volle includere in uno dei suoi concerti a Torino la marcia funebre della *Bianca da Cervia*. 'Vieni alla prova di domani' gli dice il Faccio, 'che proverò la tua marcia funebre.' Mio padre andò alla prova, ma con gran sorpresa sentì attaccare invece la marcia funebre del *Siegfried* [sic]. Solo più tardi l'amico ... gli confessò che era stato Ricordi a pregarlo di non fare il suo pezzo orchestrale". [Already in 1885 Smareglia noticed the first signs of publisher's hostility with regard to the production of his work: during that year Franco Faccio wanted to include in one of his concerts in Turin the *marcia funebre* from *Bianca da Cervia*: 'Come to the rehearsal tomorrow', said Faccio, 'I will rehearse your funeral march.' My father came to the rehearsal, to his great surprise to hear the funeral march from *Siegfried* [sic] instead. Only later on did Faccio admit that Ricordi had asked him not to perform Smareglia's orchestral work", from Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, p. 36.

⁶⁹ For more on his political activities, see Cavallini, "La frontiera interiore di Antonio Smareglia", pp. 243-244.

⁷⁰ There is a more detailed description of their friendship in Bernard Grun 1970, *Gold and Silver: the Life and Times of Franz Lehár*, London: W. H. Allen, pp. 47-50. For Lehár see Personalia, in Appendix A, and see also Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, p. 70.

the Court opera (Carner and Klein 1992: 999). It had staged Puccini's *Tosca* in 1907 and Strauss' *Salome* in 1910, at a time when they were banned from the Court opera. Probably the most useful acquaintance for Smareglia during this short stay in Pola was the archduke Stephan Habsburg, who was the commander of the Austrian military in Pola. The archduke was an admirer of music and wished not only to meet Smareglia himself, but to help the composer by introducing him, in an official letter, to the Court opera in Vienna. Smareglia moved to the Austrian capital soon after.

The composer's arrival in Vienna coincided very fortunately with one of the most prosperous periods of Vienna's principal opera house. It was the time when Wilhelm Jahn was its director and conductor, as he was for seventeen years between 1881 - 1897, during which he employed the most talented fellow conductor available, Hans Richter. In other words, it was the period when, "aided by the general prosperity of the Habsburg monarchy in the 1880s, the Vienna Hofoper [became] one of the foremost musical institutions in Europe" (Carner and Klein: 997). The two artists had introduced a large number of new works to the city. In their collaboration their work was diverse: while Jahn loved and promoted French and Italian opera, Richter was known for being the promoter of the music of Wagner. By 1888, the most important new works in the Court opera were those of Ponchielli (*La Gioconda* 1884) and Boito (*Mefistofele* 1882), and during 1888, Verdi's *Otello*. Prawy described the enormous success of this, commenting that "*Otello* was a sensation, the greatest since the introduction of electric light the year before" (Prawy 1969: 55).

In his biography of Hans Richter, Christopher Fifield described 1888 as "the busiest year of his life". Besides being engaged with concerts or the operatic seasons of London, Bayreuth and other cities, Richter was holding four different conducting posts in Vienna. During one of many periods he lived in Vienna, from 1888 until 1900, Richter conducted a great number of new works, met new artists and new composers. Smareglia was one of them. On his arrival in Vienna, Smareglia had with him two things: the complete first two acts of his new opera, and - apparently - the archduke's letter as a recommendation. According to his son Ariberto, the director of the Court opera, Wilhelm Jahn, had invited Smareglia to the theatre to present his latest work, *Il Vassallo di Szigeth*. It was a kind of audition, the committee for which included Hans Richter and Johann Fuchs, the latter being the Director of the Conservatory at the time, and an occasional conductor at the Vienna opera. If we are to believe Ariberto's account, Smareglia objected to Jahn's wish that he should play only certain fragments from the opera: he would play all of it, or nothing. The episode ended with Richer expressing his enthusiasm for the opera (he was examining the score), and promising his personal commitment to produce the work (Ariberto Smareglia 1936: 44). Richter was true to his word and conducted *Il Vassallo di Szigeth* at the Court opera on 4 October 1889,

and for the following eleven evenings. In 1894 he was to do the same with Smareglia's next opera, *Cornill Schut*.⁷¹

From a review of Fifield's writings on Richter, it appears that the author regarded the performances of Smareglia's work as of very little importance in Richter's career. For example, he states that "Richter conducted world premieres of operas which have not survived the years" (Fifield 1993: 250), and Smareglia is mentioned (only on one occasion) among the less known composers such as Robert Fuchs, Richard Heuberger and Albert Kauders. Furthermore, in the chronicle of the Vienna Opera, Smareglia is completely overlooked; a curiosity which does not quite match with the acclamations he gained during the Vienna period, as described in his biographies. Although there is no clear evidence (other than the biographies by his two sons) that he was praised, for example, by Brahms or Richter, it is likely that the conductor respected and encouraged Smareglia's work, and perhaps even had said about *Il Vassallo di Szigeth* "[it is] a beautiful opera and we must perform it. I will personally take the responsibility" (Ariberto Smareglia 1936: 44). This view is supported by the fact that Richter and Smareglia did meet again on several other occasions, as will be pointed out in the course of this thesis.⁷² For Smareglia, the period from 1888 to 1894 was also the most fruitful at an international level: besides Vienna, his operas reached Prague (in Czech, *Nozze istriane*, 1896) Prague and Dresden (*Cornill Schut*, 1893), and New York (*Il Vassallo di Szigeth*, 1890).⁷³

Authors that suggest Smareglia's life in Vienna was successful have based their views primarily on an assessment of numerous critical writings on the premieres of his operas. The information about the composer and the effects his music had on Vienna is found in the critical reviews written by the eminent Viennese music critics at the time: Richard Wallaschek, Max Kalbeck, Julius Korngold and Eduard Hanslick.⁷⁴ Besides praising some features of his musical language, such as excellent orchestration and the freshness of his lyricism, these authors understood, as Cavallini pointed out, that Smareglia's music could not *simply* be linked with the music of the "young Italian school".⁷⁵ Max Kalbeck, who had translated the libretto of *Il Vassallo di Szigeth* into German, remarked that the composer felt more at home while abroad rather than in his own country. He saw Smareglia as

⁷¹ See Christopher Fifield 1993, *True Artist and True Friend: a Biography of Hans Richter*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. *Cornill Schut* was conducted in German on 23 November 1894. However, the premiere of this opera was given in Czech, in Prague on 20 May 1893, and several weeks later in German in Dresden (6 June 1893).

⁷² Richter had encouraged Smareglia's symphonic writing at the time when the composer was writing *Oceana*. For more information on Richter see Personalia, Appendix A.

⁷³ For more about the staging of Smareglia's opera in New York, see the account of Dino Veggian, "Smareglia a New York", in *La Battana*, n. 108, pp. 87 – 91.

⁷⁴ Discussion of some reviews written by Hanslick, Wallaschek, Kalbeck and Dietz can be found in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 103-165 and also in Perpich, *Il teatro musicale*, pp. 12-17 and 51-71.

⁷⁵ See Cavallini, "La frontiera interiore di Antonio Smareglia", pp. 244-245.

“cosmopolitan in his artistic sentiment” (*cosmopolita nel suo sentimento artistico*), and thought that this opera *belongs* to Vienna (Mario Smareglia 1934: 138).⁷⁶ This view was shared by Richard Wallaschek. The critic, who was distinguished among his colleagues for taking musical timbre as an essential compositional parameter, had recognised in Smareglia’s music the echoes of German romanticism, of Italian temperament and of Slav delicacy (*morbidezza*) (Mario Smareglia: 103).⁷⁷ These multicultural elements in the composer’s compositional style were confirmed years later, by Romain Rolland: “my first impression is that he ranks between Verdi and Smetana, but with a character peculiar to Istria”.⁷⁸

For Smareglia’s operas to be conducted by the distinguished Hans Richter (who was also a friend of Richard Wagner) was extremely flattering.⁷⁹ Richter had a reputation for being very helpful to young artists and had contributed to promoting their music. Apparently, after the Vienna premiere of *Il Vassallo di Szigeth*, he had asked Smareglia to write a symphony for his concerts.⁸⁰ Years later, when the two artists met in Venice while Richter was on a series of concerts around Italy, Richter asked Smareglia if he had written any symphonies yet. Since Smareglia was at the time working on *Oceana*, he decided to arrange an orchestral suite from act II, dedicating it to the great conductor.⁸¹

The year 1892 was of particular importance in Vienna’s musical life for several reasons. Firstly, Jahn arranged for the Court opera to mount the world premiere of *Werther*, the latest work of Vienna’s ‘favourite’ composer at the time, Jules Massenet. In addition, it was the year in which the international exhibition of music and theatre took place in Vienna, providing a platform for the performances of the Bohemian National Theatre of Prague (Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride*, *Dalibor*), of the Lwow opera from Poland, and most importantly, of the new repertory of Italian opera sponsored by the publisher Sonzogno. As during earlier seasons at the Opera, it was the Italian works which attracted the most attention that year by introducing the latest operatic trend in Italy, the *verismo* operas (Prawy 1969: 58). On this occasion it was Mascagni himself who conducted his *Cavalleria*

⁷⁶ Cf. passim pp. 29-32.

⁷⁷ For more on Wallaschek see Sandra McColl, “Richard Wallaschek: Vienna’s Most Uncomfortable Music Critic”, in *International Review of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 29/1, pp. 41-73.

⁷⁸ Two of Romain Rolland’s letters (addressed to Casa Musicale Giuliana, and dated 21 November 1932 and 8 January 1933 respectively) are kept in the Civico Museo Teatrale “C. Schmidl” in Trieste. The quotation of Rolland’s comment which is inserted on the cover page of Mario Smareglia’s publication appears to belong to yet another letter of the French author.

⁷⁹ Smareglia wrote a short article about Richter in *Gazzetta di Venezia*, 1900, announcing the conductor’s first visit to Italy, quoted in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 311-315.

⁸⁰ Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, p. 61.

⁸¹ In one of the unpublished letters written in 1902, Smareglia mentioned having received a letter from Richter in which the conductor reveals his intention to perform the Suite from *Oceana* “nella prima metà della stagione inglese”, see letter B. C. 1274 in Novel, “‘Visione musicalissima’”, p. 51. Suite of *Oceana* is discussed in Chapter V.

rusticana, which had been staged the previous year by Jahn at the Court opera with “tremendous success” (ibid.). Beside *Cavalleria*, Mascagni also used the opportunity to present to Vienna another of his operas, *L'amico Fritz*, which was followed by Giordano's *Mala vita*, and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*. This last opera was described in the chronology of the Vienna opera as the “greatest sensation” among the *verismo* operas which reached Vienna. Besides the *verismo* operas, what was also new in the repertory of the Court opera in 1893 was Verdi's *Falstaff*, which had a successful premiere at La Scala during the same year.

Although it is almost certain that Smareglia was familiar with what was being produced in Vienna at the time, in no sources do we find any information about what his reactions were. His own operas, although internationally recognised, were suddenly overshadowed by a new trend from Italy. Although Smareglia missed Italian operatic *verismo* in Italy while he was in Vienna, the opportunity to see it in Vienna would surely have been helpful. Furthermore, he was soon to be involved in *verismo* himself, when he came to write his next opera.

v. Turn of the century: Pola, Trieste, Venice and Milan (1894 - 1914)

During the later stages of his time in Vienna Smareglia once again felt disenchanted with his work, prompting him to retreat to his native Istria in 1893. His initial choice of subject for the next opera was Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint Antoine* and for the librettist, he commissioned his friend Luigi Illica, who joined him in Istria.⁸² They had collaborated some years earlier, for it was Illica who had written (at the start of his career as a librettist) the two previous melodramas for Smareglia, which were performed in Vienna. The success of the two operas, *Il Vassallo di Szigeth* (Vienna 1889) and *Cornill Schut* (Dresden 1893), encouraged them to work on a new project. The only difference was that, by the 1890s Illica gradually had become very much in demand as librettist. In fact, if we look at the libretti of the 1890s and early 1900s, it appears that he was the author of thirty. His “practical eye for the stage” (Carner 1992: 85) was by then recognised and praised, particularly with respect to the text for Catalani's best opera *La Wally*, and in the collaboration with Domenico Oliva on Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*.

Smareglia's decision to work again with Illica was sensible and helped his reintegration on the Italian operatic scene, from which he had been absent for seven years. In fact, Illica's decision to write a ‘real-life’ story of local Istrian people, instead of adapting Flaubert's

⁸² It seems that Flaubert's work left a strong impact on Smareglia; the composer contemplated writing a symphonic poem of the same title, years later, cf. Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, letter n. 85. For more on Flaubert and the themes of Decadence which are embodied in his work, see Chapter IV. Illica had eventually written the libretto *Anton*, based on the novel by Anatole France, *Les Tentations de Saint Antoine*, for Cesare Galeotti, whose opera was staged at La Scala in 1900. See Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala*, vol. 1, p. 207.

novel, was what Smareglia at the time needed to get included in the Italian *veristic* operatic repertory. With the interpreters Gemma Bellincioni and Roberto Stagno, who were at the time gaining a particular reputation for their performances in *verismo* operas, *Nozze istriane* had its successful premiere on 28 March 1895 at the Teatro Comunale in Trieste.⁸³

In the 1890s, the repertory of Trieste's main theatre, the Teatro Comunale, was similar to that of other major Italian cities. The dominance of composers such as Verdi, Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti gradually diminished in the 1870s and 1880s, and the repertory included more operas from France (by Meyerbeer, Auber, Thomas, Halévy), and early works by the young generation of composers such as Catalani (*Edmea* 1887), Puccini (*Le Villi* 1887), Franchetti (*Asrael* 1889) and Smareglia (*Bianca da Cervia* 1885, *Preziosa* 1886). One of the major events during the 1870s and 1880s was the encounter with Wagner's operas: the Teatro Comunale staged *Lohengrin* (1876) and *Tannhäuser* (1878), while *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1883) was performed at the rival theatre Politeama Rossetti (while the Teatro Comunale was being restored). The reception of the German master was favourable; it did not provoke the same enthusiasm as in Bologna, neither were there artificially provoked disagreements as in Milan.⁸⁴ Even when the complete *Ring* was staged (sung in German), the reactions were "more mature from the audience than from the press" (Levi, Botteri and Bremini 1962: 45). In 1893, following the performance of *Die Walküre*, Trieste would have its own debates over the music of Wagner, in the journals *L'Indipendente* and *Il Piccolo*. The leading defenders of Wagner were Gian Giacomo Manzutto and Silvio Benco, the two writers who, as will soon be explained, became Smareglia's closest friends.⁸⁵

According to Levi, the appearance of *verismo* operas, which were in the 1890s gaining most attention in theatres around Italy and abroad, did not particularly appeal to Trieste audiences. Although Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* met with a great success in 1891, at its revival in 1894 the audience was less enthusiastic, despite the assistance of distinguished interpreters such as Bellincioni and Stagno (Levi, Botteri and Bremini 1961: 52). This was also the case with several other operas, such as Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (1893) and *La Bohème* (1897), and Giordano's *Andrea Chénier* (1899). In the view of Levi, the resistance of the audiences had a "cultural" basis. The audience preferred Wagner, the "symphonic" kind of operas, the stage peopled with "hermetic creatures, the sense of the mysterious and

⁸³ The dates of *Nozze istriane*'s premiere in both Mario and Ariberto Smareglia's biographies are dubious: both of Smareglia's sons mentioned that the opera's first performance took place in Prague, in Czech, and then soon after in Trieste. The opera's premiere was in fact on 28 March 1895 at the Teatro Comunale in Trieste (see Levi, Botteri and Bremini 1962, *Il Comunale di Trieste*, Udine: Del Bianco Editore, p. 234). For more on *Nozze istriane*, see Juliana Licinic, "Antonio Smareglia and his opera *Nozze istriane*".

⁸⁴ "Non si ripetono gli entusiasmi di Bologna né tanto meno i dissensi clamorosi, artificiosamente provocati, di Milano", in Levi, Botteri and Bremini, *Il Comunale di Trieste*, p. 43.

⁸⁵ For Gian Giacomo Manzutto see Personalia, Appendix A. Benco's critical writings are discussed in Chapter III.

demoniac ... such as they will find in Salome... ”, and nothing “too simple”, not even “music which can be remembered too easily” (ibid.: 51).⁸⁶ Among the operas which the public did accept were those by Massenet (*Manon* 1895 and *Werther* 1896), Humperdinck (*Hänsel und Gretel* 1906) and Strauss (*Salome* 1909). It is all the more interesting that the premiere of Smareglia’s *Nozze istriane* in 1895 was a full success, despite the fact that it has a veristic subject. Yet, as biographies of the composer tell us, a significant number of that same Triestine audience turned against Smareglia in time.⁸⁷

The encounter with Benco

After his success with *Nozze istriane*, Smareglia was searching for a new libretto. He was looking for a subject which would differ from *verismo*, allowing him more space for what his son described as “*sinfonia musicale*” (Ariberto Smareglia 1936: 52). It is said that he would have had a good chance of joining “the ranks of Mascagni’s followers, had he not in the meantime met the poet Silvio Benco...” (Budden 1987: 326). Although the collaboration between Benco and Smareglia will be discussed in detail in the chapters which deal with the last three operas respectively, at this stage it seems appropriate to explain how the two artists met. It was in Trieste, in November 1894, one evening when both artists were invited to the house of the journalist Gian Giacomo Manzutto. Manzutto was Benco’s friend from the Triestine irredentistic journal *L’Indipendente*, for which Benco was writing at the time. As Benco recalled, during that evening Smareglia was recounting various episodes of his life in the 1870s and 1880s, which he spent in Milan and Vienna. To the young Benco, it opened “a new world” and although he said that the first impression of the composer “was not kind”, he wrote the following description:

Era un impasto di uomo vigoroso e rilassato, dimesso ed energetico, bonario e carico di elettricità battagliera, accomodante e testardo; lo tonificavano una profonda fede in se stesso, un mai esausto entusiasmo per i sommi artisti che venerava, un’intima certezza, superiore a tutto, del valore dell’arte sua e del potere che era in lui di innalzarla a sempre maggiore maestria. [Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 12]

[He was a combination of a vigorous and relaxed man, modest and energetic, good natured and laden with rebellious electricity, accommodating and stubborn; he was fortified with a profound

⁸⁶ Levi’s discussion seems slightly one-sided since the author mentions Strauss’s *Salome*: its premiere in Trieste was only in 1909! It seems sensible to believe that, in spite of the political problems involving the co-existence of three cultures as well as the rule of the Austrian government, the influx of the operas from Austria and Germany was more alive than in other parts of Italy, which surely influenced the audience’s taste.

⁸⁷ Levi’s argument that Trieste’s audience gave a warm reception to *Nozze istriane* because of Trieste’s exposure to the operas of Wagner, or to the works of Ibsen, Strindberg and D’Annunzio, appears weak since these works are not reflected in the repertory any more than *verismo* operas were. If we look at La Scala’s repertory in the same period, the amount of *verismo* operas staged at the time is about the same. In addition, it appears odd that, for all their Decadent and “dannunzian” atmosphere, Smareglia’s operas kept encountering the most hostile reactions by the audiences in Trieste.

confidence in himself, with inexhaustible enthusiasm for the great artists whom he admired, an intimate faith, superior to everything else, in the value of his own art and in the strength which resided in him to raise it to an always greater mastery.]

It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. For years Smareglia continued to be a steady visitor and a close friend with the editorial staff of *L'Indipendente*. Furthermore, some friendships (Manzutto, Zampieri) proved to be very helpful when Smareglia needed a librettist for his future opera: the chosen writer was Silvio Benco.⁸⁸

Benco, who was only twenty years old at the time, was flattered by the request; such a task challenged his literary skills. For Smareglia he seemed to be the person he was looking for: someone, as Levi described, modern, and suitable for the “new direction” he wanted in his career. From operatic *verismo*, of which he was never fond, he diverged into the world of legends. It is interesting that for the premiere of the dramatic legend *La Falena*, which had been completed by 1897, both the composer and the librettist “looked for a neutral ambience” in order to get “the most sincere impression” from the audience. Their choice was Venice.⁸⁹

The time spent in Venice

The premiere of *Falena* was partially the reason for Smareglia's next visit to Venice. Accounts of his life at the time, provided by Benco and by Smareglia's sons, tell of another motive: the hostile attitude, primarily led by the *irredentisti*, in some Triestine circles towards the composer ever since the first performances of *Nozze istriane*. For example, it was mentioned that in 1895 Smareglia was asked if he could change the female character of Luze in this opera, because she was a “Slav character”.⁹⁰ This view is supported by the fact that from 1900 until 1908 nothing of Smareglia's was performed in Trieste. Smareglia's position can be summarised by Tomasek: “the business manipulations of the publisher Ricordi, ... accusations of being a Wagnerian, of being an Austrophile, of having a Slav background” made it difficult for Smareglia to establish himself and his work.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Benco himself does not remember from whom the idea came, cf. Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 48. For more on Zampieri, see Personalia, Appendix A.

⁸⁹ This was written by Benco in his article “Le origini della *Falena*”; see Benco, *Scritti musicali*, p. 56.

⁹⁰ Luze was a girl from Peroj, a small and old Slav village near Dignano. This request was made by Smareglia's friend Gian Giacomo Manzutto! Still, the composer refused to do this. Known as a fervent irredentist, Manzutto however, remained Smareglia's friend. For a description of Smareglia's enemies and of the whole issue of the hostility towards the composer see: Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, pp. 52-55; Ariberto Smareglia, *Il teatro lirico nazionale*; Benco, *Ricordi*, pp. 68-69; Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 31-35. Cf. also the discussion on p. 29 and 31.

⁹¹ Andrija Tomasek 1960, “*Istarska svadba u Mariboru*” [*Nozze istriane* in the town of Maribor], in *Vijesnik*, 24 March.

The number of theatres in Venice whose activity continued throughout the nineteenth century was halved in comparison with the century before. Those which remained active, besides the principal Teatro La Fenice, were Teatro Malibran, Teatro Rossini and Teatro Minerva, although the last two became cinemas by the early 1900s. The theatre which was competing with La Fenice most vigorously was the Teatro Rossini. In fact, it secured several Venetian premieres of new operas of the time, such as Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* (1893) and Massenet's *Manon* (1894). In 1897, the two new operas were Puccini's *La Bohème* and Smareglia's *La Falena*.⁹²

During the same year, Puccini's work was also included in the repertory at La Fenice, side by side with Leoncavallo's *La Bohème*. On that occasion, the public response was more enthusiastic about Leoncavallo's opera and the young talented tenor named Enrico Caruso (Carner 1992: 81). When the Teatro Rossini was about to mount Smareglia's *La Falena*, its premiere was anticipated as "a real artistic happening" (Mario Smareglia 1934: 181). Although he felt anxious, the composer was confident about his new opera, and was deeply satisfied with the repeated curtain calls, in particularly after the second act (Benco 1968: 65).⁹³ The enthusiastic premiere of *La Falena* took place on 7 September 1897, stirring curiosity as well as severe criticism among the press. Some criticisms were directed against the librettist and his "invention of a legend", which prompted Benco's own defensive reply.⁹⁴ Although this opera, as well as the event itself, signaled an important step forward in Smareglia's career, following its premiere, there were difficulties encouraging other Italian theatres to take it up, except on one occasion in Rome and Trieste in 1899. One of the reasons for this was the lack of support from any of the publishers.⁹⁵ In the view of Smareglia's son Ariberto, it also had to do with the hostility, the "small but powerful *camorra*" (*ristretta ma potente camorra*) (as Smareglia described it himself in his testament), directed by the irredentists and linked mainly with the city of Trieste. As Vito Levi remarked, it was a city where Smareglia had "many admirers, even more enemies and a few good friends".⁹⁶

⁹² Nicola Mangini 1974, *I teatri di Venezia*, Milan: Mursia. It is rather surprising that the author omitted to mention the performance of Smareglia's *Falena* considering the curiosity the opera raised among the audience and the press. Mangini's book stands as a good example of the way in which Smareglia remains overlooked as an artist.

⁹³ The second act of *Falena* is discussed in Chapter IV.

⁹⁴ The result was Benco's article "Le origini della *Falena*", published in *L'Indipendente* on 24 February 1899. Cf. footnote 87. The article is discussed in Chapter IV.

⁹⁵ The hostility directed to Smareglia is repeatedly discussed in the biographies written by his sons. The only two concerts in Venice which included Smareglia's music were held at La Fenice: 19 October 1904 and 16 April 1927. See Michele Girardi and Franco Rossi 1989, *Il teatro La Fenice: Cronologia degli spettacoli 1792 – 1936*, Venice: Albrizzi Editore, p. 310 and 372.

⁹⁶ Vito Levi 1968, *La vita musicale a Trieste: cronache di un cinquantennio, 1918 – 1968*, Collana celebrativa Trieste 1968, 3, Trieste: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, p. 36.

What soon proved to be a more important hindrance for Smareglia was his sight problem which, after an unsuccessful operation, led to complete blindness in 1900. *La Falena* was, in fact, the last opera which he wrote with his own hand. His dependency on others' help for writing and moving around soon severely complicated his life, causing him extreme financial difficulties. The blindness did not stop Smareglia from working, but it did isolate him from the world around him.

In the years between 1900 and 1911 Smareglia continued to live between Trieste and Venice, in several towns of the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region. There were sensible reasons for this change of residence, one of which is revealed in several of the unpublished letters held in Trieste, which indicate that there were problems in Smareglia's marriage.⁹⁷ Furthermore, in these two cities he had his family and his closest friends, such as Silvio Benco. In addition, the favourable reception of *La Falena* had not only encouraged him to continue to work in Venice, but by living there, he felt he was closer to his friends in Milan and therefore to La Scala. Although the biographies of Smareglia make it difficult to precisely trace his travelling, we know that for several years the composer was a guest in the house of the Venetian sculptor, Achille Tamburlini.⁹⁸ It was during this time that he met many famous artists (such as Saint-Saëns, Richard Strauss,⁹⁹ Hans Richter, and Siegfried Wagner),¹⁰⁰ and influential personalities who proved to be very helpful in his career. At the time the most important was the industrialist Count Gaudenzio dalla Zonca. It was in his villa Arcade, near Treviso, that Smareglia lived around 1902 and 1903, completing the score of his next opera *Oceana*.¹⁰¹

Milan: the years prior to Oceana

Since *Oceana* was staged in Milan in 1903, it would be helpful to look at what happened prior to Smareglia's arrival. By the time Smareglia came back from Vienna in 1893, the

⁹⁷ This part of the correspondence is preserved in Civico Museo Teatrale "C. Schmidl". Donated by Elisa Tamburlini, the letters include those which were addressed to Smareglia while he lived in Venice, in Achille Tamburlini's house, written by his friends such as Benco, Bartoli or Pierobon. Several letters were written by Smareglia's lawyer, Giorgio de Baseggio, confirming further the problems in his marriage. Several of the published letters mention Smareglia and his wife living "separated", see letter 1 and 5, in Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*. It is curious that Ariberto Smareglia barely mentions this kind of problem experienced by his parents.

⁹⁸ For more on Tamburlini see Personalità, Appendix A.

⁹⁹ According to Ariberto Smareglia, the two composers had previously met while Smareglia lived in Vienna, in 1889 (Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, p. 45 and 62). Strauss was, in fact, conducting a concert at La Fenice in 1903 with the Orchestra Tonkünstler from Berlin, at the time when Smareglia's Suite from *Oceana* was performed. See Girardi and Rossi, *Il teatro La Fenice*, p. 308.

¹⁰⁰ Smareglia's acquaintance with Siegfried Wagner is perhaps the least known. Smareglia had the opportunity to meet Siegfried in Venice in 1904, when he was a guest conductor at the concert which included the overture of Smareglia's opera *Oceana*. The conductors at the concert were Carlo Walter and Siegfried Wagner (in *ibid.*, p. 310). Smareglia's communication with Siegfried Wagner is also partially revealed through his correspondence at the time when Smareglia wanted to establish a publishing house with Wagner's son; see Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁰¹ For the main part Smareglia dictated the music of *Oceana* to his student and the Count's son, Primo dalla Zonca.

operatic climate in Italy had considerably changed. As we read in Nicolaisen's study, some of the most "intriguing, if not well-known contributions to the Italian repertory" were written by 1893.¹⁰² The author explains that some of Verdi's contemporaries "enjoyed great popularity in the late nineteenth century but have long since faded from view. All form the broad stylistic background against which Verdi's greatest works made their appearance, and together with Verdian opera they laid a stylistic foundation for the works of his most important successor, Giacomo Puccini" (Nicolaisen 1980: 3). For Nicolaisen, it was during this period that "the formation of a new, personal style" took place, and was achieved in Verdi's *Falstaff*, Catalani's *La Wally* and Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. Although the period of "Italian opera in transition" may not have changed by then, as Nicolaisen is inclined to believe, Smareglia himself and his contemporaries such as Catalani, Franchetti, Puccini and others did gradually established themselves in the operatic repertory. With the exception of Verdi's *Falstaff*, one could say that the authors of new operas of the time were those known as the "young Italian school".

It must be noted that, since he was away for nearly six years, Smareglia had missed the first triumphs of Catalani (*Loreley*, Turin 1890, *La Wally*, Milan 1892), Puccini (*Manon Lescaut*, Turin 1893) and Verdi's last masterpiece, *Falstaff* (Milan 1893). Furthermore, he had been absent when his younger colleague from the Conservatory, Pietro Mascagni, won international fame, inaugurating a new operatic style which "shocked and thrilled the Europe of the fin de siècle" (Budden 1992, III: 412). As mentioned previously, Smareglia had first heard about all these happenings while living in Vienna.

Gatti described those years as the time of "excitements and rumours" which were evolving around the Sonzogno competition, announced in the firm's journal *Il Teatro Illustrato*. The one-act winning opera, Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* (Rome, 1890) soon "conquered the theatres of the world" (Gatti 1964, I: 166). The fashion of *verismo* operas which soon took over the repertories in the Italian theatres and abroad, had also made the publisher Sonzogno become the major rival of Giulio Ricordi. The competition between the two firms marked significant changes for the repertory of La Scala. In fact, after the success of *Cavalleria rusticana*, Ricordi made sure to exclusively stage 'Ricordi' operas at La Scala for the next three years (1891, 1892 and 1893). However, in 1894 Sonzogno opened a new theatre in Milan: the once active Teatro alla Cannobiana was restored and renamed the Teatro Lirico Internazionale. Around that time, Sonzogno also had the contract for running several seasons at La Scala, which allowed him to be in "control ... and free to circulate his choice of repertory" (Gatti 1964, I: 182). The most significant years were 1895 and 1896, and the seasons proved to be dominated with operas by the French composers such as Bizet (*Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, *Carmen*), Massenet (*Manon*, *Werther*, *La Navarraise*), Saint-Saëns

¹⁰² Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera*, p. 3.

(*Samson et Dalila*, *Henry VIII*), Reyer (*Sigurd*) and operas by Mascagni (*Guglielmo Ratcliff*, *Silvano*, *Zanetto*), Leoncavallo (*I Medici*) and Giordano (*Andrea Chénier*), the last one being remembered as the only true success. Having exhausted the potential of his repertory, Sonzogno's power was soon diminished, thus strengthening Ricordi's influence.

The years around the turn of the century brought disturbances at La Scala and the theatre completely closed down in December of 1897. A sign posted on the main door read: "closed because of the death of artistic feeling, civic responsibility and common sense" (Sachs 1978: 60). Mainly, the commotion indicated that the running of the theatre needed changes, in particularly following the unimpressive seasons of 1895 and 1896, as Gatti had remarked. For example, when Puccini's *La Bohème* (Turin 1896) had its Milan premiere, the audience felt neglected because it was getting "second-hand" performances (*di seconda mano*) while in the past, it was La Scala that represented, before any other theatre, "the most important novelties" of the musical theatre (Gatti 1964, 1: 188). The change came in 1899: instead of the usual hiring of *impresarios*, a new administrative council was set up, taking on the responsibility for the productions. With the help and under the presidency of Duke Guido Visconti di Modrone, the council was formed around three astonishing artists: the vice-president was Arrigo Boito, the new general manager was Giulio Gatti-Casazza, and the principal conductor was a man of "fiery temperament and idealism", Arturo Toscanini (Sachs 1978: 61).

In Toscanini's career, the years of conducting at La Scala between 1898 and 1903 can be remembered as the years of "difficult battles for an artistic ideal and for new practices in a theatre".¹⁰³ The performances under his conducting were seen as of "highest order" (Giulio Ricordi) unless he simply shocked everybody by canceling the whole production, as was the case with Bellini's *Norma*, the second opera which was supposed to be on the repertory of the newly opened La Scala. Toscanini's efforts to improve the repertory as well as the quality of performances during his conducting at La Scala had led him to direct confrontation with Giulio Ricordi. The conductor was a "terrible irritant to him not because they disagreed about many things, but because the conductor did not know how to pretend to agree" (Sachs 1978: 69).

In the years following, the performances which were conducted by Toscanini at La Scala included several new operas written by the composers of the "young Italian school". In some cases, such as Mascagni's *Iris* (Rome 1898), the failure at the opera's premiere was improved by the "ideal, superb" (Sachs) interpretation achieved by Toscanini. Before his departure from Milan in 1903, Toscanini had also conducted Milan premieres of Puccini's

¹⁰³ "...Dure battaglie per un ideale d'arte e per un nuovo costume teatrale". See Guglielmo Barblan 1972, *Toscanini e la Scala*, Milan: Edizioni della Scala.

Tosca (1900), Mascagni's *Le Maschere* (1900),¹⁰⁴ Franchetti's *Germania* (1902) and most importantly, Smareglia's *Oceana* (1903).

The performance of *Oceana* meant that Smareglia had to visit Milan again after nearly twenty years. It was a time during which, as Gatti put it, the “for precisely 20 years Milanese theatre had left [Smareglia] aside while accepting many other composers whose artistic gifts were not superior to his”.¹⁰⁵ Smareglia still had a few good friends in Milan, in particular Boito to whom he had sent, around 1900, the completed first act of *Oceana*. It appears, from several of Smareglia's letters, that Benco and Smareglia consulted Boito also in regard to the libretto of the opera.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, on those occasions it seems that Toscanini had also seen and liked it (probably the overture of the opera). In fact, he conducted the overture of *Oceana* with great success at the concert organised by the *Società del quartetto*, held at the Milan Conservatory (in 1902), and afterwards, staged the opera at La Scala in January 1903.

There were a few technical problems with introducing *Oceana* on La Scala's stage. First, there was the complexity of conjuring up the sea world and the huge dimensions it required on the stage; secondly, as Toscanini suggested, there was “too much music” considering what, theatrically, the plot needed. Given that Toscanini made such a comment, it could be true that before performing it the conductor had ‘revised’ parts of Smareglia's score.¹⁰⁷ Prepared with what Barblan called the conductor's “*affetto paterno*”, *Oceana*'s premiere was an immediate success, attended by an exceptional audience: among others there were “Puccini, Giordano, Leoncavallo, Cilea and Franchetti” (Barblan 1972: 104-5). The event, however, stirred debate afterwards. The discussions involved not only Smareglia's opera or its libretto, but also what Gatti noticed as the “artistic criteria” of Toscanini who, as the season was coming to its end, was playing a “war of nerves with the public” (Sachs 1978: 84). In fact, Toscanini was soon to end his conducting at La Scala, half way through the performance of the last opera of the season, Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, when he ignored the audience's requests for the *bis* of the tenor's aria “*È scherzo od è la follia*”.

The behaviour of La Scala's audience during the following seasons continued to be “influenced by intrigues and cabals” (Carner 1992: 148). At times, some composers were luckier than others, such as Umberto Giordano at the premiere of his new opera *Siberia* (Milan 1903), whose work was anticipated “with affection [*simpatia*] and confidence” (Gatti 1960, 1: 222). Although the opera was actually received with limited enthusiasm, it gained

¹⁰⁴ On the same night, *Le Maschere* was staged in five different cities: Rome, Turin, Genova, Venice and Verona. Gatti remarked as follows: “Una simile parata di reclame non s'era mai vista in Italia per nessun'opera sia di musica che di prosa”, in Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala*, vol. 1, p. 212.

¹⁰⁵ “Da venti anni precisi il Teatro milanese lo ha lasciato in disparte e ha raccolto invece tanti altri compositori di pregi artistici non superiori ai suoi”, see *ibid.*, p. 221.

¹⁰⁶ See letter B. C. 1273 in Novel, “‘Visione musicalissima’”, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰⁷ Toscanini is known to have made a decision to shorten the opera after its first performance! See Filippo Sacchi 1957, *The Magic Baton: Toscanini's Life For Music*, London: Putnam, p. 162.

some international respect for a short period when it was staged in Paris (in 1905 and 1911). Nevertheless, the audience wanted to be better entertained; as Gatti remarked, “there is still a need for an opera by Verdi for the audience really to catch fire”.¹⁰⁸ Sometimes, as in the case of Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* (Milan 1904), the enthusiasm and the expectations turned into a real scandal. An elaborate description of the fiasco, most likely largely engineered, can be found in Carner’s critical biography of the composer. It is worth drawing attention to it because similar events would occur in Smareglia’s career.

After the premiere of *Oceana*, Smareglia soon left Milan. This decision may not have been very wise in terms of his career, but his blindness and the uncomfortable feeling of not being able to move about alone required it. In the years to come, Smareglia’s life revolved around the cities of Venice and Trieste, with occasional trips to Istria. His creativity led him to compose the first act of what was to remain an unfinished opera, *La morte dell’usignolo*, based on Benco’s text. Instead of continuing to write a new opera for which he did not find a strong motivation, Smareglia started revising his previous scores with the help of his two sons acting in the role of amanuenses. Some of the events that remained in the memories of his son Ariberto were Smareglia’s contacts with Umberto Giordano, Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari and the twenty year old Gian Francesco Malipiero, to whom Smareglia gave private lessons in composition for nearly two years.¹⁰⁹

Around 1905 Smareglia went for a short trip to Austria and Germany with his two friends Gaudenzio dalla Zonca and Piero Manzutto. He was hoping to renew his previous contacts by visiting his old friends in Dresden and Vienna. However, after nearly fifteen years the musical life in Vienna was considerably different. From what we can detect in Smareglia’s biographies, the time was not favourable to Smareglia because the director of the Court opera was Gustav Mahler who was not fond of the composer (Benco 1968: 121-122 and Ariberto Smareglia 1936: 69). Mahler had expressed the same attitude towards Puccini. For example, *Madama Butterfly* could finally be performed in Vienna only after Mahler resigned in 1907. Until that year, the conductor would not allow any of Puccini’s operas to be staged at the Hofoper.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, there was one friend who still had fond memories of Smareglia, and who was by now living in Vienna: Franz Lehár. Lehár was Smareglia’s friend from the time spent in Pola (1894-1896), where he was appointed as a military bandmaster. At this early stage of his career, Lehár was greatly influenced by Smareglia and

¹⁰⁸ “Ci vuole ancora un’opera di Verdi per infiammare il pubblico.” Verdi’s opera staged during that season was *Rigoletto*, see Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala*, vol. 1, p. 223.

¹⁰⁹ The references made to Wolf-Ferrari playing the vocal score and his enthusiasm for Smareglia’s *Oceana* can be found in a letter which the Venetian sculptor, Achille Tamburlini, had sent to Benco. The letter is quoted in Novel, “‘Visione musicalissima’” p. 49.

¹¹⁰ Carner, *Puccini*, pp. 175-176. Carner mentions an unpublished letter (from 1893) written by Mahler to his sister in which the composer, still in the early stage of his career, felt similarities to and liked Mascagni, “the father of *verismo*”.

admired his opera *Cornill Schut* to such an extent that the echoes of some crowd scenes and dances can be found in his own opera *Kukuschka*.¹¹¹ By 1908, Lehár was not only famous in Vienna but had achieved international fame (with *Die lustige Witwe*, Vienna 1905). As mentioned earlier, such popularity enabled him to help Smareglia: he managed to include his opera *Nozze istriane* on the repertory of the Volksoper.¹¹² The event seemed to have a positive effect because, in the same year, the opera was also staged in Pola and Trieste, and again in 1910 in Udine and Trieste.

In 1905, prior to his trip to Vienna, Smareglia went to Dresden. It was the city which in 1893 had staged his opera *Cornill Schut* (translated in German as *Cornelius Schut*).¹¹³ The successful performance was conducted by Ernst von Schuch. Schuch had, since 1882, held the position of director of the Court opera, gradually pursuing the mounting of Wagner's operas, and supporting young composers by staging their works. Smareglia was one of them. Although on this later occasion Smareglia only went as far as showing his opera *Oceana* to the conductor, what proved to be the most exciting part of the journey was the invitation from Schuch to attend the premiere of Strauss' *Salome*.¹¹⁴ Smareglia's life, following his return from Germany, was mainly linked with the city of Trieste. It was a time of great poverty that severely affected the composer and his family, an astonishing account of which can be found in Ariberto's biography, as well as in the recollections of Silvio Benco.

The time in Trieste and Milan (1905 – 1914)

Before considering the way in which Smareglia's last opera *Abisso* came to its first performance in Milan in 1914, it is instructive to note the current conditions in Trieste and the artists with whom the composer interacted at the time. Described by Levi as a "restless and noisy city", Trieste had been a free port of the Austrian Empire since the early eighteenth century.¹¹⁵ This changed in 1891 when the city lost that status, becoming the most important port of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Until it was given back to Italy in 1915, the coexistence of the three cultures, Italian, German and Slav, was tense and problematic. In

¹¹¹ See Grun 1970, *Gold and Silver*, p. 47.

¹¹² There is a letter, dated 12 January 1907, written by Gian Francesco Malipiero to Benco while the composer was in Vienna. From what can be understood in the letter, Malipiero was with Smareglia in Vienna at the time. In his letter Malipiero described the successful production of *Nozze istriane*. Furthermore, he mentioned the possibility of future performance of the overture of *Oceana* on which apparently "Smareglia will not be present: it is hard to guess what would he like to do...". The letter is kept in Biblioteca Civica "A. Hortis" in Trieste. In addition to the letter, Malipiero sent a telegram to Benco following the concert at which *Oceana*'s overture was performed.

¹¹³ It is most likely that this was the premiere of the opera. The biographical sources have different entries regarding this opera.

¹¹⁴ Schuch was, at the time, too busy with the final preparations for the premiere of *Salome* (see Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 122). It seems that Smareglia attended two performances of the opera and was so astonished and impressed that he immediately wrote a postcard about it to Boito after each event, *ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

¹¹⁵ Levi, *La vita musicale*, p. 9.

the political sphere, such a situation led to *irredentistic* rebellions, on which occasions some newspapers were shut down and their editorial staff put in confinement.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, it was troublesome for artists such as Smareglia, whose multi-national background made it appear as if he belonged nowhere.¹¹⁷ Culturally, however, it enriched the city, making it “distinctly cosmopolitan” (Durante 1992: 809). This had an impact on the choice of the operatic or concert repertory, as well as on the number of foreign artists that would end up in the city.

One artist who came to Trieste in early 1900, residing there for nearly fifteen years, was the Irish writer James Joyce. Joyce (along with his companion Nora Barnacle) first came to Italy in 1904 as a young writer who was applying for a teaching position at the Austrian Berlitz language school. Initially the teaching post was in Zurich, but he was sent off to Italy instead. Since Trieste’s school could not help him at the time, Joyce was further recommended to go to the school’s newly opened department in Pola, in Istria. Although it appears that the period spent in Pola (October 1904 to March 1905) was not as exciting for Joyce (he had to teach Austrian navy officers) during those few months he became a close friend to Alessandro Francini Bruni, the Florentine teacher who was to prove extremely helpful with his career (Crivelli 1996: 34).

It was through Francini that Joyce gained many acquaintances in Trieste, upon their return from Pola in the spring of 1905. He met, for example, the journalists from the local Triestine newspaper *Il Piccolo della Sera*, which soon gave him the opportunity to write several articles. Since this meant that he had to write in Italian, he needed a supervisor, who happened to be Smareglia’s librettist, Silvio Benco. By then Benco was considered a young intellectual, a “respected novelist, journalist and literary critic” (Potts 1969: 47). Their collaboration was described by Crivelli:

Benco, for his part, noted that there was very little to be corrected in the articles. Joyce insisted on being present during the ‘revisions’ ... because ... they would offer him a good opportunity to improve his Italian. ... After a few such meetings, all technical interventions seemed unnecessary and a long-lasting friendship between the two of them was born. [Crivelli, *James Joyce: Itinerari Triestini*, pp. 72-74].¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ It had happened to Benco; see Chapter III. 2.

¹¹⁷ See the discussion on pp. 29-32 *passim*. On one occasion, Smareglia had said: “You are not aware of the fact that our land has such a destiny, not only mine [destiny] but of all of us, to feel that it doesn’t belong anywhere? My mother was a Croatian, but what am I?” (...Lei non è consapevole che la nostra terra è tutta in questo destino, non solo mio, ma di tutti noi, di essere come a mezz’aria? Mia madre era croata, ma io che cosa sono?) in Comune di Grado 1979. Antonio Smareglia. *In memoriam*.

¹¹⁸ See Renzo Crivelli 1996, *Itinerari Triestini. James Joyce = Triestine itineraries*, Trieste: MGS Press. For a discussion of their friendship, see the article by Benco, translated as “James Joyce in Trieste”, in Willard Potts 1969, ed., *Portrait of the Artist in Exile. Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans*, Seattle: University of Washington Press. Benco thought it was an honour to have been the first to read Joyce’s early texts written in Italian. He dedicated to Joyce several articles, such as “Un illustre scrittore inglese a Trieste”, first published in

At that time Benco was living in the same house as Joyce's friend Francini, so that the three of them often met at various dinner parties, occasions on which Joyce would sing.¹¹⁹

We learn from one of Joyce's pupils, Mario Nordio, that on one occasion during their English class, Joyce "sat at his piano and sang in a fine tenor voice".¹²⁰ Nordio recalled how the Irishman admired music to such an extent, admitting "if it depended on him, singing would be the most important occupation in his life". In fact, Joyce's love for music was so passionate that he seriously considered enrolling at the Trieste Conservatory "... to train his beautiful tenor voice, and try a singing career" (Crivelli 1996: 46). Because of financial problems he ended up taking a few private singing lessons instead.¹²¹ The Irish writer was particularly fond of opera, which made him pay regular visits to Trieste's theatres. Benco recalls that Joyce showed interest in several musicians of Trieste, in particular in Smareglia, whose opera *Nozze istriane* Joyce heard in 1908 in the Teatro Politeama Rossetti. It was an opera he greatly admired and the occasion on which he was inspired to say (in a letter to Benco) that Smareglia is a composer who will be remembered in many years' time.¹²² Although there is no evidence that Joyce and Smareglia actually met in the course of that evening, there is no doubt that they knew each other when they ended up as neighbours in via della Barriera Vecchia (number 32 - Joyce, number 33 - Smareglia).¹²³

The story of Joyce depicts the positive aspects of Trieste during those years. By contrast, at that time Smareglia and his family were struggling with poverty. In fact, the years following the performance of *Oceana* (1903) were not getting any easier for the composer because he still had no publisher to support his work. On one occasion, when in 1912 Illica managed to negotiate a contract with Riccardo Sonzogno, Smareglia refused to sign it, since it was to cover a ten year period which Smareglia considered too long.¹²⁴ Smareglia's friends felt so

Umana, Trieste, 6 July 1918, pp. 1-3, and "James Joyce" published in *Il Baretto*, Turin, 10 May 1925. Both articles are reprinted in Benco, *Scritti di critica*.

¹¹⁹ An insight into their friendship (in fact, on the 'dinner party' held in Francini's home) is given in the article written by Benco's granddaughter; see Aurelia Gruber Benco 1972, "Between Joyce and Benco", in *James Joyce Quarterly* 9/3, Tulsa: University of Tulsa, pp. 328 – 333.

¹²⁰ See the article by Mario Nordio 1972, "My First English Teacher", in *James Joyce Quarterly* 9/3, Tulsa: University of Tulsa, p. 324.

¹²¹ Joyce's first singing teacher was Riccardo Sinico, the choirmaster who was considered to be the best singing teacher in Trieste at the time and who had praised Joyce's voice and talent for opera (in Levi, *La vita musicale*, p. 17). When Joyce took singing lessons again in 1908, his teacher was Romeo Bartoli, Benco's cousin and a former student of Smareglia. By then, Bartoli was the choirmaster of the Teatro Verdi and of the Teatro Politeama Rossetti. See Personalia, Appendix A.

¹²² We can read about it in Benco's letter to the composer: see page 22 of this chapter. See also Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 70.

¹²³ "Joyce was to send a postcard featuring Smareglia to the Irish composer Geoffrey Molyneux Palmer, who had set to music some of the poems of *Chamber music*, thus revealing evident pride in his neighbour...", see Crivelli, *Itinerari Triestini: James Joyce*, pp. 113-114.

¹²⁴ Illica's letter about this contract is reproduced in Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 66. The contract with Sonzogno, which was renewed annually, came through in 1924 and lasted until 1928. In 1975, the heirs of Smareglia entrusted again all the remaining materials of Smareglia to the Casa Musicale Sonzogno, the publisher

uncomfortable about the poor conditions in which he was living that they took the initiative of asking the city councils of both Pola and Trieste to award to the composer an annual pension, “*per meriti d’arte*” (Benco 1968: 156). This financial help enabled Smareglia to visit Milan again, and to try once more to triumph with his work.

Return to Milan: the years prior to Abisso

The opera Smareglia was working on at the time was *Abisso*, on a libretto provided for him by Benco at the end of 1906. The story was based on a distant episode of Italian history, the battle of Legnano, which, as Benco thought, the audience would feel passionate about; not accidentally, the audience he had in mind was the one in Lombardy’s capital city. A detailed discussion of this opera is provided in Chapter VI. At this point it is useful to see which new operas were staged at La Scala prior to Smareglia’s arrival in Milan in 1911 and the staging of *Abisso* three years later. According to Gatti, “the audience was not very happy with the repertory of the last three years [1904 - 1907]”.¹²⁵ The same audience which had whistled off the premiere of Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, and which could not come to terms with the resolute temper of Toscanini, now wished for the conductor’s return. During the first decade of the twentieth century the productivity of the composers of Smareglia’s generation considerably decreased. In the decade from 1904 until 1914, La Scala staged six new operas by this group of composers: Franchetti’s *La figlia di Iorio*, Cilea’s *Gloria* (1907), Puccini’s *La Fanciulla del West* (1912), Mascagni’s *Isabeau* (1912) and *Parisina* (1913), and in 1914, Smareglia’s *Abisso*. The decline in writing operas at the beginning of the twentieth century was partly related to the choice of libretti. When Franchetti’s *La figlia di Iorio* had its premiere in 1906, it raised great expectations because it was the first opera to be based on a D’Annunzio play.¹²⁶ However, Franchetti’s music was seen as “rather far from adding beauty to the refined sonority of D’Annunzio’s poetry”.¹²⁷ A similar atmosphere was created in the case of Mascagni’s *Parisina* (1913). Originally offered to Puccini, *Parisina* was, in D’Annunzio’s words, “a poem in which life and dream are intertwined as in the soul of man” (Carner 1992: 164). Nevertheless, Puccini refused it since he could not, as happened to Mascagni with this libretto, be “too obsequious and subservient to the poet” (ibid. 212). Instead, he was soon to write *La fanciulla del West* (New York 1910, Milan 1912), an ‘American’ opera based on Belasco’s play *The girl of the golden west*, marking “one of the most spectacular events in the annals of the Metropolitan Opera” (ibid. 204).

still today responsible for the protection and promotion of Smareglia’s music. About Sonzogno see Personalia, Appendix A.

¹²⁵ “Il pubblico della Scala non è del tutto contento degli spettacoli degli ultimi tre anni”, in Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala*, vol. I, p. 231.

¹²⁶ There are close similarities between D’Annunzio’s play and Benco’s *La Falena*. See the discussion in Chapter IV. 3.

¹²⁷ “La musica di Franchetti è piuttosto lontana dall’aggiungere la bellezza al bellissimo suono della poesia dannunziana...”, in Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala*, vol. I, p. 230.

When Smareglia arrived in Milan in 1911, he was again in touch with his friends such as Illica, Giovanni and Francesco Pozza and in particular with Arrigo Boito. Their friendship grew closer during the weekly encounters in Boito's house. They would play music of the great masters from the past, but above all they shared with each other the music of *Nerone* and *Abisso*, which nobody else had yet heard.¹²⁸ It was on these occasions that Smareglia became familiar with Boito's last opera, one of the reasons for Smareglia's later involvement in the revision of *Nerone* after Boito died. His collaboration in the completion of *Nerone* remains one of the obscure episodes in operatic history. It is known that the revision, suggested by Toscanini around 1914 and begun around 1918, went on until the completion of act I of the opera, after which Smareglia was informed by Boito's lawyer, Luigi Albertini, that the revision would stop for some time. As we can learn from Boito's biographies, the rest of *Nerone* was completed by the conductor himself and the maestro Vincenzo Tommasini. The problem was that Smareglia himself found out about Tommasini's involvement only after the opera's premiere at La Scala in 1924; the news about the completion of the opera, given in the newspaper, had not even mentioned Smareglia's name with respect to the completion of its act I. It is remembered that when Toscanini approached Smareglia about this, it was too late: the composer had already given an interview to the Trieste journal *Il Piccolo*, explaining the full 'story' of *Nerone*. As both Toscanini and Smareglia had rather uncompromising characters, this event resulted in the end of their friendship.¹²⁹

Prior to the conflict with Toscanini, the period of three years spent in Milan was what Smareglia wished it to be: his new opera *Abisso* had its premiere at La Scala. According to Benco and to Ariberto Smareglia, this was largely due to the merit of Boito and the conductor. Their efforts proved to be worthwhile: the premiere of *Abisso* had an excellent reception. However, it was repeated only for another seven nights, thought to be "too few at the time" (Gatti 1964, 1: 254). Following the premiere, Boito had apparently said: "Now the Italians can proudly claim to have their epic in music with this opera, which exalts the rebellion of Italian comunes against Barbarossa".¹³⁰ Nevertheless, the celebrations were short lived because the same year saw the beginning of the First World War.

¹²⁸ Smareglia recalled this episode of his life in his article on Boito, see Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 319 – 331.

¹²⁹ The interview was also going to be published in the Milan journal *Il Secolo*, but Toscanini managed to stop it. He was too late in the case of the Triestine journal. Smareglia's correspondence allows us to have an idea of the issue. Several sources on Toscanini also mention Smareglia as being involved in it for a while, as do the more detailed histories of Italian opera. Mario Smareglia provided an account of it in his book; see the section entitled "L'amicizia con Arrigo Boito e la verità sul *Nerone*", in *ibid.*, pp. 39-46.

¹³⁰ "Ora gli Italiani possono vantarsi, di possedere in quest'opera, che esalta la ribellione dei Comuni Italici contro il Barbarossa, la loro epopea in musica", in *ibid.*, p. 251.



Il Maestro Smareglia nel 1879

Illustration 2: Antonio Smareglia at the time when he lived in Milan

CHAPTER III

SILVIO BENCO

Si dice: Benco storico, critico di letteratura e d'arte, Benco librettista, moralista, scrittore politico, Benco romanziere, prosatore di libera fantasia. Certo, Benco fu tutto questo, ma difficilmente in tale senso specifico si potrebbe definire e misurare l'importanza della sua personalità e il duraturo messaggio che da lui ne viene. [Gastone de Zuccoli, "Silvio Benco nel ricordo dei giovani", in *Umana* 3-4, 1954]

[They say: Benco the historian, critic of literature and of art, Benco the librettist, the moralist, the writer on politics, Benco the novelist, the poet of a free imagination. Certainly, Benco was all that, but these categories can hardly define and measure the importance of his personality and the lasting message which he gave.]

III. I Introduction

To most scholars of Italian libretti at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century the name of Silvio Benco remains relatively unknown, just as is the case with Antonio Smareglia with regard to the Italian opera of the time. In Italian literature, however, Benco is remembered among the group of writers who were particularly important and active in the North-East part of Italy, in the region now called Friuli – Venezia Giulia. Among the intellectuals and writers of that region, Benco was seen as a "committed and passionate animator", a man who "took on the responsibility of introducing, firstly to the audience of Trieste and then to the rest of Italy, the aspirations and the torment of [his] generation".¹ Known as *letteratura triestina* (Triestine literati) this numerous group includes artists such as the writers Italo Svevo, Scipio Slataper, Giani and Carlo Stuparich and the poet Umberto Saba.²

Among these artists, Benco's ties with the city of Trieste were particularly close, to such an extent that the writings about him suggest that the history of Trieste in the first half of the century is "unimaginable" without his activity:

¹ "L'animatore convinto e appassionato ... che si incaricò di far conoscere al pubblico prima triestino e poi italiano le aspirazioni e il tormento di tale generazione...", from the introduction, entitled "Silvio Benco autore teatrale" by Riccardo Scrivano, in Silvio Benco 1974, *Teatro: L'uomo malato; La bilancia*, Rome: Bulzoni Editore.

² In his introduction to Benco's theatrical works Riccardo Scrivano mentions the term being used for the "last forty years" in connection with this group of artists. See *ibid.*, p. 7. The first to point to the existence of "*letteratura triestina*", in 1929, was the critic Pietro Pancrazzi, cf. Rita Corvetto 1973, "Silvio Benco narratore", University of Lecce graduation thesis, p. 5.

Non si può immaginare la recente storia di Trieste senza l'attività e la figura di Silvio Benco. Ogni avvenimento cittadino, nazionale e politico, ogni fatto culturale di quest'ultimo cinquantennio è legato a lui. ... Non c'è libro importante, nel campo della cultura e delle lettere, uscito in Italia, che non sia stato segnalato e recensito per i triestini da Benco, non c'è movimento intellettuale di cui egli non abbia parlato, non c'è fatto nelle arti figurative ch'egli abbia trascurato di illustrare alla sua città. [Gianni Stuparich]³

[One cannot imagine the recent history of Trieste without the activity and the figure of Silvio Benco. Every civil, national and political event, every major cultural happening of the last five decades is linked with him ... There is no important book, in the field of culture and literature, published in Italy, that was not singled out and reviewed by Benco for the citizens of Trieste, there is no intellectual movement about which he did not talk, there is no event in the figurative arts that he neglected to describe for his city.]

The evidence of the profound connection between Benco and his native city can be found easily: there is a patrimony which includes some 5000 articles or essays on politics, history, theatre, literature, arts and music.⁴ He spent his entire life in Trieste, the exception being the two wars during which he was in exile: in Linz (1916-18) and Turriaco (1943-1945).⁵ Besides his activity as a journalist and a critic, Benco gained particular respect as a patriot. In times which were continuously unsettled and threatening for Trieste's integration with the rest of Italy, he wrote several volumes on Trieste and its history. He defended the town by writing on issues such as in *Gli ultimi anni della dominazione austriaca* (*The last years under Austrian dominion*), and *Trieste e il suo diritto all'Italia* (*Trieste and its right to Italy*).⁶

The writings of Silvio Benco come into the focus of this research primarily because he is the author of the libretti for Smareglia's last three operas. In the course of this thesis the more important aspects of the libretti are discussed in detail, within the contexts of each of the three operas. As will be seen, the twenty year old Benco, who was a novice at the task of creating libretti, approached it with an attitude of rebellion. His operatic texts were "conceived with

³ Gianni Stuparich, in the introduction to Silvio Benco, s. a., *Trieste tra '800 e '900. Una città tra due secoli*, Bologna: Massimo Boni Editore. Originally, Stuparich wrote the text following Benco's death in 1949. The article was first published in the Florentine periodical *Il Ponte*, Florence, 9 March 1949.

⁴ An extensive bibliography of Benco's writings has been compiled by Sauro Pesante 1950, *Bibliografia di Silvio Benco*. Trieste: Tipografia Litografia Moderna.

⁵ Benco was actually not in internment in Turriaco, but was forced to leave Trieste by the fascists, who threatened his life in Trieste.

⁶ Silvio Benco 1919, *Gli ultimi anni della dominazione austriaca di Trieste*, 3 vols., Rome - Milan - Trieste: Editrice Risorgimento. Also Silvio Benco 1952, *Trieste e il suo diritto all'Italia*, Bologna: Capelli. Benco's manuscript of the later book reveals that he originally entitled it *Diritto di Trieste e del popolo italiano*, see the catalogue of the Biblioteca Civica "A. Hortis" in Trieste: Benco R. P. Ms. Misc. 58 n. 8. For more detailed information about the origin of this volume see Bruno Coceani 1973, "Ricordo di Silvio Benco nel primo centenario della nascita", in *La Porta Orientale: rivista giuliana di storia, politica ed arte* 11-12, November – December, pp. 243 - 245.

strange criteria” (Levi), created according to his “own rules”. The consequence was that the critics often called upon Benco to justify his work with Smareglia, following, or at times prior to, the opera’s premiere. The investigation of their subjects and of the numerous sources which lie behind *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* has proved to be essential both in interpreting Smareglia’s operas and in understanding what fed Benco’s own imagination as their writer. In the case of *Oceana*, for example, we learn that the music was inspired by a text which was stimulated primarily by visual art: a series of marine paintings by the Swiss painter Arnold Böcklin.⁷

However, it is important to emphasise that, in Benco’s career, libretto writing was a marginal activity. Besides those he wrote for Smareglia, his only other libretti are the two written for Gian Francesco Malipiero, and the one-act drama, *Il lago*, written for Gastone de Zuccoli, which the composer left incomplete.⁸ Among the other publications by Benco there are several novels and plays, poetry, as well as the editions of books which he translated, such as two of Goethe’s works: *Egmont* and *Wilhelm Meister theatralische Sendung*.⁹ Benco is also known to have revised the first articles written in Italian by James Joyce, while Joyce lived and worked in Trieste.

A full study of Benco’s work would go beyond the scope of this thesis, and indeed could extend into a thesis of its own.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is important to investigate what were the artistic activities that Benco was engaged in, in order to better understand his aesthetic views and his literary style. For example, among the vast number of his publications, his novels and his libretti are particularly curious. Because they reveal the impact which the atmosphere of the fin-de-siècle had on Benco, they provoked great discussions when they were published. Besides being written around the same time as the three libretti, *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso*, the three novels, *Il castello dei desideri*, *La fiamma fredda* and *Nell’atmosfera del sole*, reveal certain *similarities* to the libretti: their peculiar settings, their plots and characters, as will be seen, relate in a certain way to those embodied in the libretti.

⁷ See Chapter V. 3. i.

⁸ Cf. Chapter VI. 4. Fragments of Zuccoli’s *Il lago* (the text was written in the period between 1914 and 1925) can be found in Biblioteca Civica in Trieste among the materials left to the library by Marta Gruber Benco, Benco’s only living daughter. Cf. Personalalia, Appendix A. See also section III. 4 of this Chapter.

⁹ Silvio Benco, trans., 1932, *W. Goethe. La missione teatrale di Guglielmo Meister*, Milan: Mondadori; and Silvio Benco, trans., 1944, *W. Goethe. Egmont*, in: *Opere del Goethe*, Florence: Sansoni.

¹⁰ The studies that have appeared are mainly graduation theses. Among several of such theses (which are listed in the bibliography of sources on Benco, as a part of the edition of Benco’s *Scritti di critica letteraria e figurativa*, pp. 484-491), two in particular will be considered in this research: Corvetto, “Silvio Benco narratore”, and Mara Muscardin 1972, “Il teatro di Silvio Benco”, University of Padua graduation thesis.

III. 2 Short biography

Silvio Enea Benco was born in Trieste on 22 November 1874. His father, Giovanni Benco, was a respected Triestine lawyer as well as an active supporter of the Liberal Party. His mother, Giovanna Sardos, was from the Istrian town of Capodistria. From early childhood Benco was diagnosed as suffering from osteo-myelitis, a disease which required him to undergo serious medical treatments, and would trouble him for the rest of his life. Benco's involvement in journalism began very early in his life. The death of his father made him interrupt his schooling in 1889 and start, at the age of sixteen, an apprenticeship in the Triestine newspaper *L'Indipendente*. The journal, described as “a journal against an empire” (Flora 1957: 10), was known to be *irredentistic* and was at that time going through a particularly difficult phase: its previous editorial staff was, as Benco himself recalled, “not surprisingly, in the prisons of Innsbruck”.¹¹

Besides strengthening his feelings of patriotism, during his employment at *L'Indipendente*, Benco met numerous artists and friends who were to remain around him throughout his life. In the 1890s, these included the writer Ettore Schmitz (better known by his artistic name of Italo Svevo), the critic Gian Giacomo Manzutto and the director of *L'Indipendente*, Riccardo Zampieri, whose brother was a close friend of Ferruccio Busoni.¹² From Benco's friendship with Italo Svevo, for example, we can recognise the kind of activities and interests which these intellectuals shared: besides formulating in their writings their interest in arts and politics, both studied foreign languages, traveled abroad, and were social friends of James Joyce. They continually read foreign literature, showing particular interest in the works of Shakespeare, Goethe and Schiller; they both admired music, attended major musical events, and shared the hobby of playing the violin. In other words, as Benco's granddaughter Anna Gruber Benco said, “his true friends were James Joyce, Italo Svevo and Umberto Saba. They looked alike even physically!”.¹³

It was in 1903, around the time Benco was about to get married to Delia de Zuccoli, that Benco moved from *L'Indipendente* to the editorial staff of *Il Piccolo*.¹⁴ He ceased to sign his articles under the pseudonyms “Jago” or “Falco”, primarily because *Il Piccolo* was not as political, and secondly because he had now established himself as a critic and did not need to hide behind

¹¹ From Silvio Benco, *Trieste tra '800 e '900*, p. 255. For Riccardo Zampieri see Personalia, Appendix A.

¹² Busoni is known to have “dictated between 1884-1885 some twenty articles [for *L'Indipendente*], the only ones written by the artist in Italian”, from Levi, *La vita musicale a Trieste*, pp. 24-25. On Manzutto and Svevo see Personalia, Appendix A.

¹³ From an interview with Benco's granddaughter which was held on 7 May 1997. For more on Anna Benco see Personalia, Appendix A.

¹⁴ They married in August of 1904. About Delia de Zuccoli see Personalia, Appendix A.

false names. His responsibilities as a journalist stretched from writing a regular theatrical column to writing a number of feature stories on musical and non-musical subjects. Their diversity has been captured in the collection entitled *La corsa del tempo*.¹⁵ Chosen by Benco's friend, the poet Umberto Saba, the articles and essays were grouped into sections with the following subtitles: *Anatomies and funerals* (Anatomie e funebri), *City and nature* (Città e natura), *When the past was present* (Quando il passato era presente), *Impressions of figures* (Impressioni di figure) and *War and peace* (La guerra e la pace). Benco remained in the editorial office of *Il Piccolo* and of *Il Piccolo della Sera*, with the exception of brief interruptions during the two World Wars, until 1945. In the meantime, on his return from exile in 1918 he founded the periodical *Umana*,¹⁶ and was the co-founder of *La Nazione*, the daily newspaper which temporarily replaced the banned *Il Piccolo*. He also contributed to other newspapers, such as *La Voce Libera*, *Il Secolo*, *Il Resto del Carlino*, *Il Messaggero* and *Il Corriere della Sera*.

It must be mentioned that Benco's life and career developed within a phase of Italian history which stirred patriotic feelings similar to the times of Risorgimento. The difference was that, this time, the movement was localised: for an Italian, life in Trieste at the turn of the century was particularly agitated. In 1891 the city lost its status of a free port, a privilege which it had held since 1719, when it was conferred by the Austrian Emperor Charles VI. The continuous presence of the Austrian government among what was predominantly an Italian population, created a feeling amongst the citizens of Trieste of living in what one critic described as an "experimental city".¹⁷ Since by the end of the century and in the early twentieth century the town had gradually become the most important port of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the atmosphere remained politically and socially very tense. Benco had developed an interest in politics as a teenager, and by the time he was 24, in 1908, he was given charge of the column called "The thread of politics" (*Il filo della politica*), in the Sunday editions of *Il Piccolo*. His enthusiasm for defending Trieste and Italy, in opposition to the Austro-Hungarian government, twice caused his arrest while still a teenager, and eventually lead to his exile in Linz during the First World War.¹⁸ In 1946, for his life's work and his contribution to the city's culture, he received the title of *laurea in honoris causa* from the University of Trieste. He died in Gorizia on 8 March 1949.

¹⁵ Benco, *La corsa del tempo*; cf. Chapter II, p. 23, footnote 14.

¹⁶ Benco's *Umana* was published in that year only. In 1951 Benco's daughter Aurelia Gruber Benco started again with the publication of the journal, until 1973. See Personalia, Appendix A.

¹⁷ From the article by Remigio Marini published in *La Voce Libera*, 26 March 1949.

¹⁸ During the First World War the whole editorial staff of *Il Piccolo* was, at some point, exiled. Benco, in his autobiography, recalled his effort to try to keep up with the journal's publishing, but on one occasion fire broke in and almost cost Benco his life. From Benco, *La Voce Libera*, 9 March 1949.

III. 3 Benco as remembered in Italian literature

Fra quanti libri strani possiede la letteratura moderna, è *Ulysses* il libro più strano in cui io mi sia mai imbattuto. [Benco on James Joyce, in *Il Baretto*, 10 May 1925]

[Of all the strange books of modern literature, *Ulysses* is the strangest of all those which I have come across.]

When one is reading the critical writings on Benco, the feature which stands out is the respect with which he is spoken of. He is seen as “among the most illustrious personalities in Trieste”, the figure who dominated the panorama of intellectual life in the city in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Among the vast amount of written work which Benco created, his articles predominate. The published editions in which many of them are collected stand as the most vivid confirmation of his commitment to the cultural life of his city.²⁰ His role as a journalist enabled him to follow the leading political and cultural events in Trieste and outside. Furthermore, such an environment provided him with an opportunity to meet numerous fellow artists, amongst whom it is particularly worth while to mention James Joyce.

Joyce's life in Italy has been extensively studied by many scholars; the sources include memoirs and recollections of Joyce by his pupils or friends, including those of Benco and his family.²¹ The picture we get from sources on Benco and Joyce, is of a respectful and long-lasting friendship, which developed beyond the time Joyce spent in Trieste. The two writers continued to correspond once Joyce moved to Zurich (1915-1918) and later to Paris (1920-1941). We learn for example that, Joyce's brother, Stanislaus, visited Benco a few times while Benco was in internment in Linz, bringing “his brother's greetings”, as well as an edition of *Dubliners*.²² In the meantime, Joyce himself sent to Benco copies of *Exiles* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a young man*. Later on, the Irish writer would do the same with *Ulysses*:

Grazie della lettera. Prego imposti il ‘typescript’ dei due episodi insieme colla rivista anche ad Ettore Schmitz per essere trasmessi poi a mio fratello. Glieli promisi quando era qui di passaggio qualche mese fa. E mi scriva che cosa pensa di Madonna Circe e delle sue significazioni non appena le urne urinarie lo permetteranno. Cordiali saluti. James Joyce. [letter from Joyce to Benco, send from Paris on 2 February 1927]

¹⁹ From Francesco Flora 1957, *Celebrazione di Silvio Benco*, introduction by Raffaello Courten, Trieste: Circolo della cultura e delle arti, p. 6.

²⁰ The published collections of Benco's articles and essays, besides those already mentioned, are Benco, *Scritti di critica*; Benco, *Scritti musicali*. Cf. Chapter II, p. 23, footnote 14.

²¹ See for example the article by Aurelia Gruber Benco 1972, “Between Joyce and Benco”, in *James Joyce Quarterly* 9/ 3, pp. 328-333.

²² Stanislaus was apparently also in internment in “the neighboring camp of Katzenau”, cf. Willard Potts, ed., 1969, *Portraits of the Artist*, p. 56.

[Thank you for your letter. Please, post the ‘typescript’ of the two episodes along with the journal also to Ettore Schmitz, which will be then passed on to my brother. I promised it to him when he was passing through a few months ago. And tell me what you think of Madonna Circe and of her significance as soon as the urinary urns allow it. Affectionate greetings. James Joyce]²³

It appears that after he had sent Benco several chapters of *Ulysses*, he also mailed him a “review copy” of the book, a privilege which apparently only one other Italian enjoyed.²⁴ From Benco’s own recollections we discover that his wife, Delia de Zuccoli, on one occasion had visited Joyce and his family while in Paris; she found him “rather changed... he’s getting younger, and has become altogether a man of the world. In his house, as always, music reigns... and the Triestine dialect is the family’s customary language.... They all speak our dialect, taking pleasure in preserving the harshness of the local accent.... He recalls one by one the many Triestines to whom he taught English...” (Potts 1979: 49-50).

It could be said that, if we try to place Joyce in relation to the ambience of the *letteratura triestina* he appears to be one of its *non-ordinary* members. Numerous sources confirm the fact that he was profoundly fond of Trieste. The reasons were numerous: Trieste was a ‘European influenced’ city, which consisted of mixed cultures, had a variety of spoken languages, and was full of foreigners which gave it cosmopolitan features; furthermore, something in its “wide bay ... resembled that of Dublin”, and even the people appeared to be “of the same temperament as himself” (Crivelli 1996: 70). We know that Joyce had a hard time leaving it; an experience he faced twice: first in 1915, due to the First World War, and then again in 1920, because upon his return from Zürich after the war, the city was not the same.²⁵

Before Joyce left Trieste for “the rich cultural environment which was the Paris of the twenties” (Crivelli 1996: 16), his achievements had been quite considerable and in fact he carried out a considerable amount of his major works. “[H]e published his first book, *Chamber Music*; wrote twelve chapters of his first novel, *Stephen Hero*; finished *Dubliners*; rewrote *Stephen Hero* as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; completed his play, *Exiles*; and began

²³ According to Will Sayers, it is possible that Joyce was asking Benco to view his draft of the Nighttown section of *Ulysses*, as soon as Benco’s health permits. In his comment on “urinary urns”, Joyce was probably playing with the expression “*urne cinerarie*”, possibly meaning as ‘chamber pots’, suggesting some disorder of the urinary tract which Benco may have had. The card which Joyce sent to Benco is kept in Biblioteca Civica in Trieste; the text is quoted in its entirety, and to my knowledge has not been yet published. My gratitude should be expressed to Mr. Will Sayers, from Cornell University Library, for his assistance in interpreting and translating this Joyce’s letter.

²⁴ The other Italian to whom Joyce sent a review copy of *Ulysses* was Carlo Linati, the Italian writer who had translated *Exiles*, and wrote about Joyce’s work. Cf. Willard Potts, *Portraits of the Artist*, p. 48.

²⁵ More on Joyce’s difficulties in leaving Trieste see Crivelli, *Itinerari Triestini: James Joyce*, pp. 10-14.

Ulysses” (Potts 1979: 47).²⁶ The period of his development in Trieste dates back to 1904, the year in which, he applied for a teaching post in Zürich while still in Dublin. However he pursued a series of adventurous experiences and ended up in Trieste’s Berlitz language school instead.²⁷ At that time he was gaining a reputation as a “newcomer who was a marvel at teaching English” rather than a young Irish writer.²⁸ As he used to say, he taught English “to everyone in Trieste”; his popularity provided him with numerous pupils, with many of whom he developed close friendships, such as Italo Svevo and Roberto Prezioso.²⁹

The friendship with Benco started off in a slightly different manner. When in 1907 Joyce came to the editorial staff of *Il Piccolo della Sera* in order to write a series of articles on Ireland, Benco was one of the journalists he was introduced to. Their friendship developed while the two of them ‘worked’ together on revising Joyce’s articles, which he had written in Italian.³⁰ After a few sessions however, the situation changed: “the day we argued about a word and he was right, with his dictionary in his hand, it became clear to me that his manuscripts no longer needed my corrections” (Willard Potts 1979: 52). Although he thought that Joyce’s Italian was “a bit hard and cautious, but lacked neither precision nor expressiveness”, what Benco was intrigued by during such sessions was the singularity of Joyce’s literary style, something that he later described as “poetic torment, the keen critical mind, the paradoxical *diablerie* of Joyce” (Potts 1979: 52). During their encounters Benco and Joyce soon ended up engaging in intellectual discussions. Their educational backgrounds revealed that they shared the same interests in literature (noticeably in Ibsen, and in D’Annunzio for example), they admired contemporary art and were intrigued by psychology, a fact which can be explained by the two of them belonging to the same *Triestine* scene. At the time, the popular authors which they debated included, for example, Strindberg and Ibsen, as well as Freud, the psychoanalyst whose echo in Trieste was particularly vibrant.³¹ As one of his students recalled, Joyce himself left a strong impression on his pupils, since while teaching them English he talked to them about

²⁶ An account of Joyce’s achievements while the artist lived in Trieste is given also in the excellent article by Benco, entitled “James Joyce”, see Benco, *Scritti di critica*, p. 126.

²⁷ Joyce first spent some time in the Istrian town, Pola, and then moved to Trieste in the spring of 1905. For more about Joyce’s arrival in Italy, see Chapter II. 2. v. Also see Crivelli, *James Joyce*.

²⁸ From Benco, “James Joyce in Trieste”, in *Scritti di critica*, p. 50.

²⁹ Roberto Prezioso was the editor of *Il Piccolo della Sera* in 1907, the year in which Joyce was introduced to the journalists of the newspaper and started to collaborate with Benco. Joyce’s comment was mentioned in Benco’s article “Un illustre scrittore inglese a Trieste”, in Benco, *Scritti di critica*, p.117.

³⁰ Cf. Chapter II. 2. v. An account of the articles which Joyce had written for this newspaper can be found in Benco’s essay “James Joyce in Trieste”, in *ibid.* and in Crivelli, *James Joyce*.

³¹ It appears that until 1929, Trieste was the only city in Italy which had a psychoanalyst. Dr. Weiss, who was from Austria, was also a student of Freud. See Corvetto, “Silvio Benco narratore”, p. 11.

“Kokoschka, Mestrovich”; his conversations were always “vivid, incisive, and so varied that nobody could foresee its subjects...”.³²

Much as this kind of discussion affected Benco, even more significant was the impact of Joyce’s written work. Since Svevo, Prezioso and his brother Stanislaus were “no longer being suitably understanding or sympathetic” (Potts 1979: 48), it was Benco who became for a while Joyce’s “literary confidant”. Benco wrote two particularly valuable articles after reading *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*.³³ Taking a “risk” of discussing a “very difficult Irish writer”, Benco reflected on Joyce’s style, singling out the kind of features which remain most distinctive for the Irish writer: his faith in always representing the truth, even when describing a human soul; his attention in observing and analysing human life in all its aspects; his skills in psychological investigation and reflection; and above all, his *musical prose*:

È il color locale, il color degli uomini, delle idee, delle parole stesse: parole in grigioperla potrebbero dirsi, poichè l’autore le coglie nella realtà, non altrove che nella realtà, fedele per principio alla rappresentazione meticolosa del vero,... le coglie nella realtà ma fa giuocare [sic] su di esse una luce, fa correre un ritmo, una cadenza espressiva, che appartengono alla facoltà illuminante ed armonizzatrice dell’arte. [Benco, “James Joyce”, in *Scritti di critica*, p. 118].

[It is the local colour, the colour of people, of ideas, of words themselves: pearl-gray words, one might say, since the author catches them only in reality, faithful as he is, in principle, to the meticulous representation of reality, ... he captures them in reality but throws upon them a light, creates rhythm, an expressive cadenza, which are the illuminating and harmonising strengths of art.]³⁴

We must turn our attention to the city of Trieste. Set in a bay at the north-eastern corner of the Adriatic sea, Trieste’s physical layout, as well as its turbulent history, gave to this city an identity which could be described as somewhat odd, and which Italian writers characterised as “contrasting”:

Questa città, che ha una sua lunga storia e non ha storia, ...che appartiene da sempre all’Italia ed è troncata dall’Italia; questa città provinciale, che ha il respiro di una grande città europea...; Trieste

³² Mestrovich was a Serbian sculptor whom Joyce greatly admired; he had some of his work in his home. The quotation derives from one of Joyce’s students, Mario Nordio, at the time a young Triestine critic. Cf. Mario Nordio, “My First English Teacher”, p. 323.

³³ Both articles are published in Benco, *Scritti di critica*.

³⁴ Joyce’s love for music, his passionate singing, attendance of operas, and his high opinion of Smareglia’s music has been mentioned in Chapter II. 2. v.

vive, incitante con suoi contrasti... [Giani Stuparich, "Amore per Trieste", in *L'Approdo letterario* 9, 1960, p. 4]

[This city, which has its own long history and has no history, ... which has always belonged to Italy and is broken off from Italy; this provincial city, which has the atmosphere of a great European city...; Trieste lives inspiring in its contrasts....]

Politically the image of the city became gradually more complex; it led, at first, to the emergence of strong irredentism, which, at a later date, was in large part responsible for Italy's becoming involved in World War I. On the other hand, culturally, the closeness of three cultures was enriching. It meant a "confluence of different cultures and experiences, from Italian to German and Slav" (Flora 1957: 11). The fact that the city was open to the artistic influences of its neighbouring cultures, in particular German and Slav, meant that Trieste was also, more than any other Italian town, Austrian - oriented. In other words, there was an influx from all sides: the chronicle of the musical life in Trieste at the time reveals numerous artists from Austria, Hungary or Istria working and living in Trieste, while many Triestines or Istrians ended up going to study in Vienna, one example being Smareglia himself.³⁵

In such a social and cultural milieu, Benco seems to have appeared at the right moment. A spirit that was profoundly Italian as well as cosmopolitan enabled him to embody the connection between different arts and to unify them. Besides engaging in political affairs, he soon became involved in artistic ones. For example, one particular issue in the last decade of the century was how to judge the music of Wagner. Along with the critic Manzutto, Benco took the position of 'defending' the music of Wagner against the 'old fashioned critics' following the Triestine premiere of *Die Walküre* in 1893.³⁶ More importantly, it was around that time, in 1894, that he met with Antonio Smareglia. Their encounter, as was mentioned earlier, occurred in Manzutto's house.³⁷ Although their meeting might have been coincidental, it seems reasonable to believe that this was not the case with their collaboration. The fact that Smareglia was a declared Wagnerian must surely have had a bearing on his decision to accept the idea of Benco writing a libretto for him when he was asked to do so in 1895. Because of Benco's general critical alertness to what was happening in the arts, and because of his interest in music, the encounter with Smareglia proved to be more significant than either might at first have thought.

³⁵ A more detailed account of these artists can be found in Levi, *La vita musicale*.

³⁶ See Vito Levi, Guido Botteri and Ireneo Bremini, *Il Comunale di Trieste*, pp. 45-46. For more on Benco's articles on Wagner see section III. 4 of this chapter.

³⁷ See Chapter II. 2. v.

III. 4 Benco as a librettist – ideas, characteristics and influences

Certo gli fu il compagno e guida in questo suo viaggio musicale Antonio Smareglia... . [Levi, in *La Voce Libera*, 8 April 1949.]

[Certainly, his companion and his guide in this musical journey was Antonio Smareglia.]

One thing that distinguishes Benco from the other members of the *letteratura triestina* was his interest in musical theatre. His involvement in libretto-writing began very early in his career: by 1895, besides his first text for Smareglia, *La Falena*, he had written a substantial number of articles for *L'Indipendente*, some poetry and one short story, and was becoming known more as a journalist than a writer.³⁸ In the years from 1892 to 1894 he developed an idea for what would become his first novel, *Il castello dei desideri*.³⁹ Among seven libretti in total, created in the span of twenty years, the three texts written for Smareglia (besides *Falena*, there was *Oceana* in 1898 and *Abisso* in 1906) were the ones which became most widely recognised and earned him a reputation as a librettist. The remaining four libretti are lesser known: while *La morte dell'usignolo* and *Il lago* by Smareglia and Zuccoli respectively remained incomplete, the two written for Gian Francesco Malipiero, *Elen e Fuldano* (1907-9) and *Canossa* (1911-12), were destined to fall into oblivion, one of the reasons being Malipiero's own secretive attitude towards any work he composed before 1922.⁴⁰

A study of Benco's libretto-writing reveals that he was an unusual figure. One curiosity, for example, is the fact, that unlike most musico-dramatic works of the 19th century, which were based on a pre-existing play or novel, Benco's libretti were all created out of his own imagination. Furthermore, a closer look at their plots, atmospheres, and metric structure reveals literary qualities which were different from *traditional* libretto writing. Because his priorities were literary ones, he paid scant regard to the formal features of traditional libretto craftsmanship. His creativity was animated by the suggestive and mysterious world of the Symbolists, as well as by the elements of the 'fantastic', which he assimilated from his favourite writer, Shakespeare, and from figurative art. As a result, during his earlier phase in particular (until 1905), he composed the kind of stories which seem vague and timeless (*Falena* and *Oceana* for example), and in which nature is transformed and given particular force, as in a

³⁸ In his short autobiography Benco mentioned his early poems. See Benco, in *La Voce Libera*, 8 March 1949.

³⁹ This novel occupied Benco more than any other work: he completed *Il castello dei desideri* by 1898 and rewrote it in 1903. The book was finally published in 1906 with D'Annunzio's help: the writer's encouragement of Benco's book can be seen, to an extent, in the letters which he sent to Benco. The letters are preserved in the Biblioteca Civica in Trieste under the signature R. P. Ms. Misc. 58, 10.

⁴⁰ For a more complete account of Malipiero's two operas written on Benco's texts see J. C. Waterhouse, *Gian Francesco Malipiero*, p. 93, pp. 109-110.

painting by Böcklin.⁴¹ The feature which is common to all of Benco's libretti is that there is not the logical continuity of a well-made plot, nor the dramatic effectiveness we find in the libretti of Boito or the Giacosa – Illica team. More in-depth investigation of his libretti reveals that they formed part of the literary project he was engaged in throughout his career: all of the seven libretti are closely tied in with *his own* novels. In other words, it seems that Benco's libretti fall within what Jürgen Maehder described as *Literaturoper*.⁴²

Although Maehder in his discussion of the origins of Italian *Literaturoper*, restricted the term to the kind of opera “based on a text that existed as a play before it was set to music by another person”, he agrees that there are many *borderline cases* “in which the term is often used to indicate the literary value of the libretto itself, or of the source play, novel or poetry” (Maehder 1988: 92). It is in this category that Benco's operatic texts belong. In fact, the problem which one encounters when studying his work as a librettist relates to the whole panorama at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century in which the art of libretto writing was drastically changing. The collaboration between the younger generation of composers and the poets or writers who were new to the task of writing an opera led to a changing relation between the two parties. The younger composers looked for different and more interesting poets rather than professional librettists. It was the kind of collaboration in which a composer, wanting to move away from traditional subjects and plots, encounters a poet whose interest goes beyond the creation of the text itself: he needs music to exalt his poetry. In the case of Benco himself, he went as far as suggesting to Smareglia, through his text, the *images* he thought were suitable and needed music. In doing so, his involvement moved in the same direction as D'Annunzio with Pizzetti. The writer went through many stages of collaborations before he was finally satisfied with Pizzetti. He claimed that his music “maintains intact the predominance of the word... In his *Fedra* ... the word emerges ... in the silence which precedes the sounds and in the silence which follows them”.⁴³

⁴¹ It was Francesco Flora who compared the atmosphere of Benco's novel *Il castello dei desideri* to that of the Swiss painter Böcklin and to the German painter Franz von Stuck (1863-1928), a member of the Munich Secessionist Group, whose art also has an allegorical and symbolic character. As well as Böcklin some Belgian Symbolist painters (such as Fernand Khnopff) who evoked the same marine and mysterious atmospheres as Maeterlinck's plays, might have exerted some influence on Benco's imagination. I owe this suggestion to Dr. Paul Barnaby.

⁴² Jürgen Maehder 1988, “The Origins of Italian *Literaturoper*: *Guglielmo Ratcliff*, *La figlia di Iorio*, *Parisina* and *Francesca da Rimini*”, in *Reading Opera*, ed. By Arthur Gross and Roger Parker, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

⁴³ The full description is as following: “Una musica che mantenga intatto il predominio della parola, la sua. Nella *Fedra*... la parola emerge... nel silenzio che precede i suoni e nel silenzio che li segue”, from Rubens Tedeschi 1988, *D'Annunzio e la musica*, Scandicci, Florence: La Nuova Italia, p. 84. D'Annunzio was particularly prone to be involved in composing the music as well, in his collaborations with Puccini, Mascagni and Franchetti for example. Cf. Chapter V.

To an extent, for the Italian operatic scene, the emergence of *Literaturoper* meant the active participation of its most influential writer at the time, Gabriele D'Annunzio.⁴⁴ D'Annunzio's influence on both literature and music was “insidious and hypnotic” and “pervaded an entire epoch of Italian history” (Waterhouse 1968: 17). With regard to his involvement in music theatre, he gradually became popular, appealing to those composers who wanted particular literary stimulus, and who were interested in more sophisticated themes, the ones Puccini called “always a bit in the clouds”.⁴⁵ A curious example is Franchetti, who was at once fascinated with the “pastoral tragedy”, *La figlia di Iorio*, upon reading a summary in a journal. In spite of his initial lack of belief in D'Annunzio's theatre, Franchetti was instantly excited about it, recognising in it a “strong drama” and the “elements of a grand libretto” (Tedeschi 1988, 41).⁴⁶

Even though D'Annunzio began writing *for* the musical theatre later on in his career (with *Parisina*, in 1906), much later than Benco himself did, it was clear that the poet's previous writings greatly appealed to Benco; this influence was further intensified after they met in 1902.⁴⁷ When his first libretto came to public attention (*Falena*'s premiere in 1897), the style of Benco's writing provoked strong criticism from those who condemned his bizarre subject and its theatrical inefficiency. Such criticism was also directed towards his other writing; unconventional stories emerged from his libretti as well as the novels. The themes he dealt with as well as the kind of characters he created were the aspects which, as the critics noticed, confirmed his awareness of the fin-de-siècle mood. Although Chapter IV investigates the atmosphere of Decadence in relation to Benco's writing of *Falena*, it is relevant to emphasise that Benco absorbed everything he read at the time; in his texts there are echoes of many other writers, especially of Wilde, Kipling, Rossetti and all of the French Symbolists.⁴⁸

Even in the titles of Benco's works of prose fiction, which were written alongside his libretti, *Il castello dei desideri* (1906), *La fiamma fredda* (1900) and *Nell'atmosfera del sole* (1918), there is a reflection of his response to the artistic climate of the time. All three novels have much in common with the themes and preoccupations of his libretti. One of the fundamental particulars

⁴⁴ Cf. Chapter VI. 4.

⁴⁵ “Un pò sempre nelle nuvole”, Puccini's expression, in a letter to Ricordi, in regard to *Rosa di Ciprio*, one of the texts on which D'Annunzio was working at the time (around 1906) especially for Puccini. Cf. Tedeschi, *D'Annunzio e la musica*, p. 47.

⁴⁶ More detailed discussion on *La figlia di Iorio* is in Chapter IV of this thesis. See also *ibid.*, pp. 41-44.

⁴⁷ The existence of part of the correspondence which the two poets exchanged sheds more light on their friendship. In the letters which D'Annunzio sent to Benco (dating from 1902-1918), some parts of the text reveal how D'Annunzio enjoyed talking about his work to Benco, how they “love the same things” and how “the poet feels he needs to talk to Benco”. This part of their correspondence is available from the Biblioteca Civica in Trieste, R. P. Ms. Misc. 58, 10. Unfortunately, the letters which Benco sent to D'Annunzio were unavailable at the time of this research.

⁴⁸ Benco himself mentioned these artists often in his writings.

about Benco's stories is the deliberate absence of real, *dramatic* fibre, in order to create more poetic writing and evocative stage pictures. This characteristic in D'Annunzio's novels *Trionfo della morte* (1894) and *Il fuoco* (1900) has been described as "the abandonment of the plot".⁴⁹ The impression that "nothing ever happens", produced by D'Annunzio's *Trionfo della morte*, for example, resembles the slow, narrative atmosphere in Benco's *Il castello dei desideri*: the story tells of the "dispersed desires" (Flora 1957: 19) of the three protagonists. All three individuals have peculiar characteristics: there is Bertramo, a "philosopher" who has written a "shocking" book entitled *Il morale della morte*. He is ironic and mysterious, showing "no trace of age".⁵⁰ With an attitude similar to that of a psychiatrist, Bertramo's conversations become irritating to the characters: he provokes them into talking about their repressed feelings, dreams and memories, and he then continuously analyses them. His friend Zoilo is the opposite: instead of intellectualism, he dedicates himself to "love". On the question of whether he is happy with his life, he answers "I have always distracted myself with love".⁵¹ 'Never bored' in his life, Zoilo is the *homme fatal* in the novel, whose perversity eventually costs him his life. The story is set in a castle owned by the Duke Ulrico, who is one of Benco's weak, utterly helpless characters, a man whose "soul is in pain".⁵² Once he is seized by strange sensations, for example during his wedding night with a wife whom he does not yet love, his conscience disturbs him and he becomes unable to behave normally. A similar kind of agitation is experienced by King Stellio, when he succumbs to the strange appeal of Falena; or by the poet Mariano Ruda (from Benco's novel *La fiamma fredda*) who is fascinated by the protagonist, a "glacier/Farouche", to borrow Schmidgal's phrase, a "fierce glacier" woman called Arsinoe.⁵³

It is relevant to point out that the atmosphere of *Il castello dei desideri* also recalls Maeterlinck. The similarities are numerous: its non-historical, anti-realist setting, the pervading echo of a legend or a fairy tale, peopled with characters whose names are often invented or belong to a variety of cultures, and their sense of being prey to strange sensations or enchantments. On the other hand there are features in the novel which much more strongly evoke the influence of D'Annunzio: Benco's language contrasts with the simple, almost fairy-tale language of

⁴⁹ Robert Adams 1968, "The Operatic Novel: Joyce and D'Annunzio", in *New Looks at Italian Opera: Essays in Honour of Donald J. Grout*, ed. by William W. Austin, New York: Cornell University Press, p. 267. The abandonment of the plot and a symphonic arrangement of text is developed also in the short novel *Le vergini delle rocce* (1895); information from a private conversation with Dr. Paul Barnaby.

⁵⁰ Silvio Benco 1911, *Il castello dei desideri*, Milan: Fratelli Treves, p. 3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

⁵² Duke described himself and his girlfriend Laus as "un anima malata e la sua cura", see Benco 1911, *Il castello dei desideri*, p. 8.

⁵³ Schmidgal uses this expression (in quotation) in discussing Mallarmé's poem "Hérodiade" in which the central femme fatale is called "glacier / Farouche". See Schmidgal, *Literature as Opera*, p. 256.

Maeterlinck, and moves more in the direction of the kind of *recherche* prose suggested by D'Annunzio's style, which reached its fullest expression in *Il fuoco* (1900).⁵⁴

Benco's stories such as *Il castello dei desideri*, *Falena*, or *Abisso*, unfold through a series of sensations experienced, or even lived by their characters: we learn about their inner feelings and the dreams that intoxicate them, and of their explosive desires, which lead them to immoral behaviour, revealing the dark corners of their psyche. There is very little *external* action in Benco's fictional writing; instead, there are subtle shadings of characters' "stati d'animo" (states of mind) as well as an endless number of descriptive passages which create vivid images. His fascination with nature led him to observe it and evoke its immanent forces, creating a powerful background in which his characters exist; sometimes it is a nocturnal sea picture, at other times it is a warm, summer afternoon with a mild *erotic* breeze sensed in the air:

Da parecchie ore si alternavano piogge brevi e fugaci pallori di sole, fra guazzi di nuvole. Or dalle aperte finestre una fragranza d'umido e di terra vermicolante e lasciva si insinuava e si fondeva in sensazione più vigorosa agli odori del tabacco e del vino; ora v'entrava, tepido come il fiato, un erotico soffio d'aria pluvia e su le chiome euritmiche dei faggi si scorgeva una rincorsa di perle... E l'ondeggiare di frasi isolate dalle labbra di Zoilo, e le ispirazioni sbalzanti di Bertramo su la mandola... [From Benco's *Il castello dei desideri*, p. 42].

[Brief showers had been alternating for hours with fleeting sun rays infiltrating in between scattered clouds. One moment a scent of moisture and wormy, lascivious soil would seep in and blend into powerful sensation with the tobacco and wine fragrance; the next an erotic breeze of rain-laden air, mild as a breath, would come in and in between the eurythmic foliages of the beeches one could notice the glimmering of pearls ... and the fluctuating of isolated phrases coming from Zoilo's lips, and Bertramo's bold inspirations on the mandola...]

Besides the kind of writing in which the story unfolds through narration, recollection or visions rather than through a dramatic action, another recurring aspect of Benco's stories is the attention he pays to the world of sensual and somewhat bizarre pleasures. One might mention Bertramo at the moment when he admires and touches the dead body of Zoilo's lover,⁵⁵ or the scene in act II of *Abisso*, with Hanno's flagrant seduction of Mariela, while her sister Gisca is present. In one story after another the characters explore their sexuality: in *Falena*, it will be

⁵⁴ The three characters in Benco's novel to an extent bring together the three heroes of D'Annunzio's works: the sensualist Andrea Sperelli of *Il piacere*, the psychological experimenter Tullio Hermil of *L'Innocente* and the impotent abulic Giorgio Aurispa of *Il trionfo della morte*. This information has been noted from the private conversation with Paul Barnaby. On D'Annunzio's novel *Il fuoco*, see Chapter IV. 3, and Chapter V. 3. iii.

⁵⁵ See Benco, *Il castello*, pp. 172-173.

the repressed, subconscious world of the King Stellio; in *Abisso*, it is the sensuality of the two sisters; in the novel *Il castello dei desideri* it is the openly indulgent behaviour of the young man Zoilo. The slow and heavy atmosphere which is often felt in Benco's stories presents the *inner* lives of the characters as nervous and reactive; the conditions of these characters are the subject matter of the drama. It is not so surprising that Benco's stories were, on more than one occasion, compared to the paintings of Böcklin.⁵⁶ One interpretation is that Benco supplied 'latent dramaturgy'; the apparently static images in his stories hide the whole world underneath them. The characters in them are moved by mysterious forces which are beyond their control. Such situations can be seen in the nightmare of King Stellio, as it extends through the whole second act of the opera, or in Gisca's hallucination, in which she sees an apparition of a priest (in act II of *Abisso*), as well as in the 'fantastic comedy' *Oceana*, in the scene when the siren's song is about to cause the wreck of a ship which is approaching.

Consistent in his leaning to the aesthetic of Decadence, Benco's works appear saturated with the themes of sensuality. An important part of this is the image of the *femme fatale*, who is often present in Benco's stories and will be discussed in the chapter on *Falena*. Furthermore, it can be said that almost all of the characters found in Benco's libretti have their prototype somewhere in his novels.

III. 5 Writings on music

Benco's aesthetic views and ideas on music can be most closely seen in his critical writings on music. Although a detailed study of them would lead us away from the main theme of this study, a brief account is necessary. Of the articles written throughout his career, Benco dedicated about one tenth to musical subjects. The volume entitled *Scritti musicali di Silvio Benco* assembles a large number of them. It is a compilation which includes the most diverse titles, reflecting the writer's vivid interest in the cultural scene around him.⁵⁷

What is particularly noticeable, even within the published collection, is the high proportion of articles written on Wagner.⁵⁸ The earliest date back to 1893 and relate to a notable event in Trieste: the staging of Wagner's *Die Walküre*, which provoked a polemical debate in more

⁵⁶ For example Flora, *Celebrazione di Silvio Benco*. The painter's influence on Benco and the direct link with the images of *Oceana* are discussed in Chapter V. 3. i.

⁵⁷ Benco, *Scritti musicali*.

⁵⁸ Out of fourtfive articles, eleven concern Wagner.

conservative circles.⁵⁹ What transpires from the Wagner articles is the respectful way in which Benco talked about the German master. The articles seem almost a kind of homage to the composer; in his evident admiration, Benco sought to bring the “divine genius” (*il genio divino*) and his art closer to the Triestine public. In doing so, he avoided a critical tone: Benco defended Wagner by comparing him to Italian composers who could not escape the influence of Wagner’s ideals in developing their own operatic style. In other words, according to Benco, the “destiny” of Italian music was guiding it towards such novelty.⁶⁰ In his discussions, Benco emphasised the difference between *Die Walküre* and Wagner’s early operas, with which the Italian public was more comfortable (such as *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*). *Die Walküre* was more complex, it was “entirely poetic”, and the kind of musical theatre which had its own “soul”, its “mind” and its own “aesthetic principle”, which had to be understood and *listened to* in a different way from what one was used to.⁶¹ Wagner’s opera embodied “intimate conviction” and an “elevated concept of opera”, in which Benco saw the *new* form of poetry on stage, the kind of poetic theatre which he soon went about creating with Smareglia. It can be said that at a time when Wagner’s influence was still an issue widely debated among artists, Benco stepped in with the kind of commentaries which, although *cautiously* written, revealed his understanding of the composer and reflect an individuality that is stronger than one would expect from a nineteen-year-old critic.

Another impressive feature of Benco’s articles on music is the diversity of their topics, which range from the article on Giovannina Lucca (1894), to reflections such as *Musica di Shakespeare*, *Musica e nostalgia* (in 1905) and *Hanslick e la sua sorte* (1904). Although revealing that he is capable of grasping the essentials of the events or of the artistic work he has seen or read, Benco’s complex visions at times seem disappointingly unapproachable. Their tantalizingly vague and overly philosophical tone make it difficult to draw well defined conclusions. Nevertheless, the essays entitled *I contatti delle arti* (in 1906), or *I postwagneriani* (1906) for example, deserve to be mentioned because they, once again, confirm that Benco was particularly perceptive in recognising the essential issues of the arts at the turn of the century. Writing about the movements which followed Romanticism, Benco draws attention to the expressive synthesis between the arts. An illustration of his view can be seen in the following quotation:

Dopo il romanticismo vennero nell’anima umana altre cose: venne il naturalismo, con le sue analisi a punta fina e le sue dissezioni di ambienti; venne l’impressionismo pittorico, con la sua rapidità di

⁵⁹ Among Benco’s articles which have not been included in the selected edition there are several more about Wagner written in 1891 and 1892. See *ibid.*, p. 231.

⁶⁰ Benco mentioned the example of Boito, Catalani, Franchetti and Verdi’s *Otello*. See *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶¹ The article which emphasised this point is “Wagner e il pubblico”, *ibid.*, p. 14.

visione nello sfolgorio della luce; e venne anche quel fenomeno d'arte che fu chiamato "la decadenza", e di cui la nota fondamentale mi sembra essere la sovrapposizione di tutte le arti, dimodochè un romanzo rifaccia una sinfonia, la scena del teatro rifaccia un quadro, e quadro somigli una partitura di musica. [Benco, in *Scritti musicali*, p. 143]

[After Romanticism, other things entered the human soul: there was naturalism, with its precise analysis and its dissection of the environment; there was impressionism in figurative art, with its rapidity of vision in the glare of light; and there appeared that phenomenon in the arts called "decadence", of which the fundamental principle seems to be the superposition of all the arts, so that a novel recreates a symphony, a stage-setting recreates a painting, and a painting resembles a musical score.]

III. 6 Conclusion

The primary purpose of this overview was to give an introduction to the range of Benco as an artist. The idea was to draw attention to those significant elements of his literary style which are reflected in his libretti, and to point to those particularities of his taste in arts and literature which directed his imagination as a writer. The complexity of his character as a journalist, poet, writer and a librettist makes it difficult to provide more than a partial view. The aspects discussed do, however, serve as a *preparatory* guide towards the main subject of this study: the three operas written by Antonio Smareglia.

CHAPTER IV

LA FALENA – “ACTIVITY IN DREAM”

La Falena, leggenda in three acts.

Venice, Teatro Rossini, 6 September 1897.

[L]o spettacolo incontrò pienamente il favore del pubblico, il quale continuerà certamente numeroso a gustare l'opera *La Falena* che è destinata ad aumentare il repertorio delle opere durature. [The Count Franchi Verney della Valetta, in *L'Indipendente*, 5 October 1897]

[The performance met with the full approval of the audience, which will continue certainly in a great number to enjoy the opera *La Falena*, a work destined to enrich the repertory of long-lasting operas.]

IV. I Introduction

When *La Falena* had its premiere in the Teatro Rossini in Venice, in 1897, the event was remembered as a real “artistic happening”.¹ Its plot and its musico-dramatic style had little in common with the other new Italian operas at the time; one other premiere during the same season at the Teatro Rossini was Puccini's *La Bohème*, for example.² Furthermore, *Falena* had very little in common even with Smareglia's earlier operas: his *Nozze istriane* (Trieste 1895), written two years previously, evoked the realistic setting of the small Istrian village of Dignano, and with its subject matter, versified by Illica, belonged to the then fashionable *verismo* opera. For all the singularities of the opera, *Falena*'s premiere was a real success. We can trace from the numerous critical reviews of the time the most laudatory opinions about Smareglia: his music was seen as “elevating”, “creative with musical ideas”, “highly original”, “richly interwoven” in a continuous texture, and containing the most delicate “nuances” (*sfumature*) in its expressivity. He was also recognised as a true Wagnerian, to quote Colombani, “one of the best”.

¹ Such comment was made Alberto Boccardi, in *La Perseveranza*: the article is quoted in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 181.

² For the repertory of the new Italian operas written at the time see Time line 2 and 3, Appendix C.

The fact which raised additional curiosity among the press was that Smareglia appeared with a new and ‘inexperienced’ librettist. Silvio Benco was at the time a young twenty-three-year-old writer who was establishing his career as a journalist in Trieste. His involvement in providing a libretto for Smareglia provoked fervent and diverse criticism. Several reviewers, such as Colombani, found Benco’s creation to be “childish”, containing the kind of plot which had “no philosophical or poetic significance”. A similar view was stated by Zorzi who wrote that Smareglia’s libretto was a “bad choice”, and its element of the fantastic was “childish”. Zorzi complained that Benco made “no concession to the preference of the audience”.³ But, besides these two examples of critics who were simply not familiar with Benco’s name, there were other commentators with broader views who understood his intentions. They recognised the “distinguished poetic form” of the text: “although it perhaps lacked characterisation ... [the libretto] lent itself stupendously to the lively imagination of the composer”.⁴

The most perceptive remark, which grasped the core of Benco’s text, was written by Alberto Boccardi. His review revealed that he was well acquainted with Benco’s other writings. By mentioning his novels, in whose style he noted some “conquering oddity” (*conquidente stranezza*), Boccardi brought the elements of Benco’s own literary style directly into comparison with *Falena*, suggesting that the libretto belongs to the same “unusual” style. He emphasised, for example, that *Falena* embodied the kind of “bizarre and suggestive” features which were close to the literary world of Maeterlinck.⁵ To use Mila’s words, it was Benco’s “precious literary *decadentismo*” which permeated the text, and which will be a starting point for discussing this opera.

The main reason why the study of *Falena* leads us, for a moment, to investigate the period of Decadence is because, as Boccardi detected, its plot contains elements with clearly symbolist connotations. In addition, there were many allusions to Symbolism and the atmosphere of Decadence made by Benco himself when he was writing about *Falena* two years after the opera’s premiere. The heavy criticism which he received from the reviewers for *Falena* prompted him to write a defensive article, “Le origini della *Falena*” (1897), in which he unveiled his concept of the musical theatre. His belief in the theatre with a “musical soul”, the vision of *Falena*, her representing a “picturesque symbol of the night”, and the repercussions which such an image had on music, for example, are the aspects which will be discussed in the

³ The critic Zorzi, in *L'Italia del Popolo* [n. d.], quoted in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 191-193.

⁴ The following two quotations can be found the same article in *L'Indipendente* on 5 October 1897: “Una forma poetica che non manca di distinzione” (written in *L'Italie*) and “La leggenda a cui manca forse il colorito nei personaggi ... si presta stupendamente alla fervida immaginazione dello Smareglia” (written in *Don Chisciotte*).

⁵ “[U]n richiamo alle concezioni così bizzarre e suggestive di Maurizio Maeterlinck...”, by Alberto Boccardi, in *La Perseveranza*, also quoted in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 182.

following sections. As will be seen, the undramatic plot, its dream-like world, its enigmatic characters and its legendary setting confirm Benco’s absorption in the atmosphere of fin-de siècle.

The particular attention dedicated in this Chapter to the nature of Decadence and to artistic sensibility at the turn of the century is appropriate because, besides *Falena*, the following two libretti which Benco would write for Smareglia were also impregnated with the literary and artistic spirit of their time. Both *Oceana* and *Abisso*, in their own ways, confirm that the collaboration with Benco marked a fundamental change in the composer’s dramaturgy; they offered quite a different dimension to Smareglia, in both a musical and dramaturgical sense. The emphasis on the poetic element inherent in these libretti directed the composer to interpret the drama by focusing on music to such an extent that some thought there was “too much of it”.⁶ As will be discussed, the basis of Smareglia’s music drama resided in the orchestra rather than on stage. For all his effort to successfully dramatize Benco’s libretti, as will be seen with *Falena* in particular, we can note that in interpreting the plot the composer was most efficient when evoking the picturesque or atmospheric elements rather than elaborating the dramatic development of the story. Often this implied a concentration on the inner drama of the protagonist’s soul, or, as in *Falena*, an evocation of the hallucinatory moods of the principal characters.

Before we begin discussing the first of the three operas, it is useful to quote the words of Gian Andrea Gavazzeni, the Italian conductor who knew Smareglia’s music intimately and conducted it on several occasions. His formulation seems to epitomise the nature of Smareglia and Benco’s collaboration:

Incontro tipico, compromesso in un cultura e gusto coevi. Ancora wagnerismo, simbolismo tedesco-francese, ambizione per un teatro di poesia, mischiato di velleitarismi e di suggestività. Ambizione in accordo con la negazione più volte manifestata per la librettistica romantica e naturalista.⁷

[A typical encounter, involving contemporary culture and taste. Still Wagnerism, German and French Symbolism, ambition for a poetic theatre, mixed with velleity and suggestiveness. An ambition in accordance with the several-times manifested repudiation of libretti of the Romantic or realistic kind.]

⁶ Such was the opinion of Toscanini on *Oceana* (see Chapter V), or with respect to *Abisso*, of most of the critics (see Chapter VI).

⁷ Gavazzeni’s comment is included in his introduction to the edition of Benco’s *Scritti musicali*. See Benco, *Scritti musicali*, p. x. Gavazzeni conducted *Falena* in Trieste in 1975.



Illustration 3: *The beguiling of Merlin* (1874) by Sir Edward Burne Jones

IV.2 Synopsis

Characters:

King Stellio

Old Uberto

Albina - his daughter

Falena - the night ghost

Morio - the sailor

The thief

Fishermen, hunters, women, children, Albina's maids.

The action takes place on a European coast by the Atlantic ocean, in early Christian times.

Act I: A clearing in the forest

It is a late afternoon in May. Albina, accompanied by a group of young girls, comes back from the forest. They are in the vast clearing surrounded by large oak trees, beyond which the ocean can be partially seen in the distance. With the exception of Albina, all the girls gather new spring flowers. Albina is melancholy, and misses her secret love, King Stellio, who has gone hunting. Nothing seems to comfort her: neither the jasmine flower given to her by a young girl, nor the sailor's song that is coming from the sea. Her father, Uberto, longs to see her smiling, and tries to comfort her by telling her that the King is on his way back from hunting. He then tells all the girls how hunting captivates the spirits of young men. It keeps them occupied throughout the day until the night makes them realise it is time to go home. While the forthcoming return of the hunters cheers up all the other women, Albina is still upset. After Uberto encourages her to tell him the source of her distress, she reveals that she has been having horrifying dreams. In these nightmares she sees the apparition of a strange woman.

Suddenly they are interrupted by the arrival of a group of peasants. They have caught a thief in the forest and want him to be judged by the King. Everyone is cruel toward the thief, hitting him and cursing him. Yet his confession that he is poor and only wants to get some food for his hungry children touches Albina's heart. The sound of hunters is heard in the distance. Upon his return, Stellio addresses his people, while the thief approaches Albina. Recognising in Albina all her purity and generosity, he begs her to save him. Albina is moved by the misfortune of this man and persuades Stellio to release him.

It is evening time. Following the incident with the thief, everyone retires to go home. Stellio holds Albina back and declares his love for her. They remain in the clearing in the forest for

some time expressing their emotions until darkness approaches. Albina seems restless but is comforted by Stellio’s love. Suddenly, a mysterious creature appears, tearing Stellio away from Albina. Terrified, she recognises the creature as the frightening woman from her dreams. The “unknown” creature hypnotises Stellio into sleep, and before disappearing declares that he will be hers during that night. Albina is frightened. When Uberto and his friends return, they are perplexed by the sight of the sleeping Stellio and the agitated Albina beside him. They gently move their sleeping King, taking him to his palace, and praying for God to protect him. Albina leaves with her father.

Act II: Falena’s cave

It is night. Falena is in her hovel, a rocky cavern with huge stones scattered on the floor. In a corner a pile of wood is burning, faintly illuminating the place. While waiting for Stellio to arrive, Falena has a vision of his escape during the night. The place is dark, illuminated with a ray of moonlight and with the trembling of a dying oil lamp. When Stellio arrives he cannot see anything. He is shivering and suddenly becomes aware of Falena’s presence. Insisting that no further lamps are lit, he is upset and is not ready to trust her. Furthermore, he seems to hear Albina’s voice from far away. Soon Falena begins to seduce him and offers him a cup of wine which affects him immediately. He asks for her name and Falena replies that she wishes to be called Redana. Overcome by the wine and by her presence, Stellio at once finds Falena attractive and irresistible. Enjoying this erotic game and her power over him, she persuades Stellio to kill Uberto, who has arrived at the cavern in order to save the King. Under the influence of Falena’s magic powers and the wine, Stellio kills Uberto, but is immediately horrified by his deed and by the blood on his hands. Falena entices him to drink more wine. However, the appearance of the blood on his hands is too distressing. The blood will not wash off. Stellio is distracted again by the voice heard from the distance; it is Albina’s weeping. Falena tries to drag him away, telling him that they need to follow where their dreams are. Still, Stellio’s obsession with Albina’s voice makes him increasingly desperate.

Act III: On the seashore, just before dawn

The first signs of dawn break over the horizon. The fishermen are back from the sea. While their boats rock gently at anchor, the oldest sailor, Morio, tells them stories of the sea. When he was young, they used to sail the sea until reaching remote islands and meeting strange people

on them. He knows that many mysterious events can happen on the sea or in the forests which are close to the beach. Before going to sleep he wishes them a safe journey.

Young sailors comment on Morio’s legendary stories. Suddenly, the sound of hunters’ horns are heard from the forest; they wonder whether it is their King. Instead, it is other hunters calling them into the woods urgently, as the King and old Uberto are missing. In the meantime, Stellio and Falena begin to argue. While the agitated Stellio constantly hears voices calling him, Falena, as the daylight slowly returns, starts to lose her power. Recognising Morio’s boat in the distance, Stellio calls for him. He wants to sail away with his Redana; however, the King is terrified to realise that she is vanishing. As she bids him farewell, Falena disappears in front of his eyes. Desperate, he asks Morio who is this mystery, this shadow?

Morio reveals to him that Falena is a night ghost that wanders through the dark, seducing men and then fading away when the dawn breaks. Anyone who has a relationship with this figure retains the sin upon his soul. As he learns about the strange creature, Stellio seems to hear Albina’s voice again. As people start to arrive, he confesses, begging for Albina. He is desperate to die. Everyone thinks their King is mad. Albina arrives and notices blood on his hands. Stellio admits that he killed Uberto and asks to be punished for it. While Morio explains about the dangerous creature from the forest who bewitched the King during the night and brought on this tragedy, Stellio cries out. Albina decides to save him through her forgiveness. She kisses him and dies. Stellio, in terror, throws himself over her body.



Illustration 4: *La Falena*, act I, the scene with a thief. Stage design is kept in the archives of the Civico Museo Teatrale “Carlo Schmidl”, Trieste.

IV.3 Decadence and *La Falena*

i. The nature of Decadence

The literary and artistic period towards the end of the 19th and in the early 20th century had its most particular tendency summed up in France by Paul Verlaine. In his famous sonnet *Langueur*, published in *Le Chat noir* in 1883, he wrote “Je suis l’Empire à la fin de la décadence”, thus drawing attention to the whole era that became known as Decadence. The phenomenon of Decadence, however, did not appear suddenly, nor have its boundaries been defined clearly by historians. Since it is still studied intensely by literary scholars, the present discussion cannot presume to give an entire and definite overview of the movement. The purpose is to assemble those themes and characteristic outlines of Decadence which seem to form the background for Benco’s libretto of *Falena*. As will be seen, my understanding of the Decadent movement is derived mainly from the studies by Praz, Pierrot, Carter, Schmidgall, Gioanola and Del Principe.

In outlining the historical sources and limits of Decadence, there is, as A. E. Carter phrased it, a “thorny little problem”: for example, the difficulty of making a simple distinction between Decadence and Symbolism, the two tendencies which, during the decadent era, were often equated by contemporaries, although “both groups hated each other”.⁸ In some interpretations it is claimed that the decadent period was “transitional”; during a period of seven or eight years it preceded and prepared the emergence of Symbolism.⁹ An alternative view, held for example by Praz, is that of ‘Romantic Decadence’, which sees the movement as the last phase of Romanticism, or, in the case of Carter, the conviction that there were different phases in the evolution of the decadent sensibility: the late Romantic phase (from 1830 to the beginning of Naturalism), the Naturalist phase (to 1884) and the fin de siècle phase (to the early 20th century).¹⁰ Although the definition of what Decadence or decadent sensibility was and how long it lasted for still remains debatable, there is one particular aspect which all interpretations have in common. The explanation, captured in the following words by Michaud, underscores the development and the architects of this tendency:

⁸ From A. E. Carter 1958, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature: 1830 – 1900*, Toronto: Toronto University Press, p. 138.

⁹ The view was sustained particularly by Guy Michaud, see Jean Pierrot 1981, *The Decadent Imagination: 1880-1900*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 5 and footnote 4-6 on p. 267.

¹⁰ See Carter, *The Idea of Decadence*, pp. 26-27.

Stemming in all probability from Baudelaire and from Gautier’s preface; revived by Verlaine; embodied by Montesquiou; formulated by Huysmans; the decadent attitude, a necessary prelude to the revolution ... became more than a fashion: a collective phenomenon. [Michaud, in Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination*, p. 267]¹¹

Thriving in French literature in the 19th and early 20th century, the idea of decadence became a “serious preoccupation” in the second half of the 19th century (Carter 1958: viii). During that time the group of intellectual bohemians around Paul Verlaine founded a series of periodicals, such as the *Revue Indépendante*, *Revue Wagnerienne* and the weekly *Le Décadent*, thus loudly emphasising the presence of a cultural phenomenon. *Le Décadent*, which appeared from 1886 until 1889, was in fact inspired by Verlaine’s sonnet, revealing how “the idea held such a fascination for writers of the period”: for Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, Moréas, and Huysmans for example (Carter 1958: 113). Among those who began experimenting with the new literary taste and “who were to prove the masters of the decadents” for the rising generation of writers in France, Britain and Italy were Gautier, Baudelaire, Flaubert and Poe (Pierrot 1981: 17). Their work was constantly read and consulted, making a direct impact on the decadent sensibility and its aesthetic. An example can be seen in an article written by Paul Bourget, one of the leading critics of the time. In his essay on Baudelaire, dating from 1881, Bourget entitled one of its sections “The theory of Decadence”, formulating what Pierrot regarded as “the first true manifesto of the decadent esthetic” (Pierrot 1981: 16).¹²

To explain and analyse in a detailed way the ‘cult of decadence’ with all the literary trends it involved would require a whole study in itself, and would go beyond the aims and scope of this research. Our primary concerns are the various themes, atmospheres and preoccupations which permeated the literature and arts of the time, and which provide us with a key to the thoughts of Benco and to the obscure world he created in his libretto *La Falena* (1896). It is significant that the period in question saw the emergence of a number of new trends, which coexisted “in a state of relative symbiosis” (Pierrot). Besides Naturalism and Symbolism, Pierrot identifies other tendencies in literature and the arts, such as “the importance of music, the use of free verse, a constant concern with technical detail, philosophical idealism, a predilection for the world of dreams and legends, and, lastly, an abundance of works with double meanings ...”

¹¹ The term “Gautier’s preface” refers to Gautier’s writings on Baudelaire which are often brought up in discussion of French Decadence, for example in Schmidgall, *Literature as Opera*, pp. 254-255. Pierrot uses the quotation from Guy Michaud 1961, *Message poétique du symbolisme*, Paris: Nizet.

¹² The author draws this quotation from Bourget’s *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, which Bourget had written and published in Paris in 1881.

(Pierrot 1981: 6).¹³ In addition, there existed a series of “imaginative currents and tendencies”, such as the “use of mythical and legendary themes, dream narratives, [and] texts devoted to the effects of drugs on the imagination”, which became most fashionable among artists.¹⁴ Summed up in the expression “decadent imagination”, it is these imaginary tendencies in particular which, as will be discussed shortly, can be recognised in Benco’s creation of *Falena*.

An exemplary model of such a text dealing with strange and unusual aspects of the Decadent era was provided in Huysmans’ novel *A rebours*. Begun in 1881 and published in 1884, the book contained “...every aspect of the decadent idea hunted down and analysed, [and] became like Bibles for the younger generation of writers” (Carter 1958: 134). The protagonist of the novel, Des Esseintes, in many ways represented the “decadent hero”: bored and disillusioned with the world around him, he rejected nature while admiring all that was new, artificial, contorted and monstrous. For example, he devoted himself to reading Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade*, and was fascinated by its visual representations, *Salomé* and *L’Apparition*, the two celebrated paintings of Gustave Moreau, whose art reflected the themes “of Fatality, of Evil and Death incarnate in female beauty” (Praz 1951: 295).¹⁵ As a result of his escape from reality, Des Esseintes discovered his inner self. The sensations caused by this discovery, which were shared by the decadents, can be best captured in the following quotation:

These emotions once felt, the decadent analyses them. He cultivates them in the recollection of his reverie, he brings them into focus, molds his thought to them in order to capture their most delicate convulsions ... He wishes to know himself, he observes himself, he analyzes and notes everything, down to the most evasive of half-felt emotions, the most tenuous quiver of psychic states scarcely yet formed, barely detectable; and by means of this deep, meticulous, remorselessly pursued investigation, he is constantly pushing back the frontiers of the unconscious.¹⁶

Des Esseintes’ personality, his state of mind, as well as his attitude to life, in many ways project the image of the artist himself at the end of the 19th century. His attempt to retire from

¹³ For example, the decline of the Naturalist movement, which was at its peak in 1880, can be noticed among their own members, including Maupassant and Huysmans, who began to write *A rebours* in 1881. Cf. Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination*.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gustave Moreau (Paris 1826 – 1889), French painter whose style attracted much attention because his interpretations of mythology, legend or historical themes often included strong sexual overtones. His paintings were often seen as enigmatic, imaginative, and with mysterious settings full of symbolism, earning him the description of a painter of a ‘literary idea’ rather than of a visual image. Praz thought that Moreau composed his pictures in the style of “symphonic poems”, following the example of Wagner’s music (see Mario Praz 1951, *The Romantic Agony*, 2nd ed., trans. by A. Davidson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 290). The author pointed out that these two paintings were first exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1876, marking the success of Moreau. See *ibid.* p. 295.

¹⁶ From Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination*, p. 123. The text, written by an anonymous author, was published in *Le Décadent*, 15 October 1888, and was quoted in Michaud, *Message poétique*, p. 348 note 20.

the corruption of the modern world resulted in him protesting in various ways: the artist ended up transforming reality, cultivating anti-naturalism, advertising love for anything that was artificial, and encouraging sexual perversions. Often this would occur while he retreated into his inner world. In other words, their imaginations as well as the kind of themes decadent writers chose were becoming more subjective and intimate. It was these “secret activities in the depths of the psyche” (Pierrot 1981: 122), often remote from the categories of time and space, which then the artist explored and analysed, in particular the mysterious appearances of dreams. That was one of the reasons why dream became fundamental, gaining a privileged attention, while the improbable, distant and vague world of legend “echoed the deepest desires of the fin-de-siècle soul” (Pierrot 1981: 193).

Even though discussions of Decadence usually begin with and evolve around French literature, in which, through a series of literary influences, the imagination and the decadent sensibility developed, its main representative was not French. According to Mario Praz, “the most monumental figure ... in whom the various European currents of the second half of the 19th century converged was given to the world not by France but by Italy” (Praz 1951: 385). The man whose appearance left its mark on the art, the poetry and the spiritual atmosphere of the time in both Italy and France was Gabriele D’Annunzio. Although decadent imagination was not the main stream within Italian literature, the impact of D’Annunzio’s personality and his work was so strong that it led most of the interpretations of decadence in Italy (expressed by both Italian and other authors) to view this period as one of the “estetismo d’annunziano”.¹⁷ In fact, in the view of some historians, there was a “lack of alternatives” for describing the end of the century, considering the influence D’Annunzio had on literature at the time.¹⁸

D’Annunzio’s work was, however, preceded by two other main tendencies which existed in Italy at the time: *verismo*, which is related to French naturalism in literature, and the more curious phenomenon of *scapigliatura*, which we shall provide a brief account of.¹⁹ The *scapigliati* were the members of a new literary and cultural movement in literature in Italy which had its origins back in the 1860s, mostly in Milan and Turin. The movement gathered together the young artists and intellectuals who were first to react in opposition to the sentiments of Italian Romanticism. Their rebellious spirit and their manifesto was described in the novel *La Scapigliatura e il 6 febbraio* (1862), by Carlo Righetti (under the pseudonym

¹⁷ See for example Elio Gioanola 1991, *Il decadentismo*, Roma: Edizioni studium, and Tedeschi, *D’Annunzio e la musica*. Although in Italy the term *decadentismo* is used to describe the literary and artistic period, for the sake of clarity this thesis uses the standard English term *Decadence*. See UTET, vol. IV, p. 65.

¹⁸ See Gioanola, *Il decadentismo*.

¹⁹ For an in-depth study of the Scapigliatura movement see David Del Principe 1996, *Rebellion, Death and Aesthetics in Italy: the Demons of Scapigliatura*, Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press.

Cletto Arrighi).²⁰ The most important focus of *scapigliati* was their yearning for the renewal of art in Italy, one that was shared by much of Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. These rebellious young men, among whom were poets (Emilio Praga, Ugo Tarchetti), painters (Daniele Ranzoni, Tranquillo Cremona), composers (such as Faccio, Boito, Catalani, Smareglia), were to expand their literary horizons mostly by absorbing literature from France (Baudelaire, Gautier, Hugo), and their musical ones by following the ideas of Wagner and his *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The most prominent artist among those intellectuals was the poet, composer and critic, Arrigo Boito (1842-1918); *Mefistofele* (1868, rev. 1875), composed to his own libretto, is considered to be the most important of *scapigliato* operas (Benco 1977).

Scapigliatura comes to our attention primarily because, as more recent studies have highlighted, its members greatly contributed to promoting the elements of literary style which led Italian literature directly into fin-de-siècle currents.²¹ In his discussion of the “demons of Scapigliatura”, David Del Principe explains their manner and gives examples which confirm that their writings influenced decadent literature. The new perspectives which they gained by admiring foreign writings (Shelley and Radcliffe besides those already mentioned) allowed them new liberties for their own writings, which revealed modern themes, especially with respect to sexual awareness and its different manifestations. To cite Del Principe,

I sight Scapigliatura in several instances, not as a footnote to Romantic sensitivities, but as a new territory in which the thematics of dementia, psychosexuality, the Gothic, antibourgeois-conformism, decadence, and the avant-garde, submerged in the opus of Tarchetti and Arrighi, can be excavated. [Del Principe, *Rebellion*, p. 13]

It was Ugo Tarchetti in particular who made the most significant contribution towards the renewal of Italian literature at the time (Del Principe 1996: 23). His novel *Fosca* (1869) and his *Racconti fantastici* (1869) both invoke the nervous and errant sexual energy characteristic of the Gothic novel, and deal with androgynous eroticism (in *Fosca*, for example). Furthermore, Tarchetti's stories, such as *Uno spirito in un lampone*, as well as Boito's *Un corpo*, can be regarded as works which “extend a theoretical arm from Scapigliatura to the neighboring discourse of the fin de siècle and beyond”, leading in the direction of D'Annunzio and Wilde

²⁰ As Del Principe establishes in his study, besides Cletto Arrighi, the “most versatile and principal literary exponent” of Scapigliati was Ugo Tarchetti. See Del Principe, *Rebellion*, p. 23.

²¹ In his study Sansone pointed out that literary *verismo* originated when Verga came to Milan during the 1870s and met with *scapigliati*, finding the most stimulating environment to try out his new style. See Sansone, “*Verismo* from literature to opera”, p. 6.

(ibid.: 112). As Del Principe summarised it, “decadent elements in Scapigliatura are less evidence of Romantic decay than of the creative vitality of modernism”.²²

To return to Decadence. If the introduction of certain ‘decadent’ themes into Italian culture came with *scapigliatura*, the fashion for it was propagated by D’Annunzio. In the view of Mario Praz, there was something ‘elemental’ in D’Annunzio’s nature, the kind of characteristics which revealed the poet’s “rough spirit” (*spirito crudo*), and which he inherited from his home province of Abruzzi, where “the general level of life is instinctive and primitive” (Praz 1951: 385). Even the poet himself described Abruzzi as “*Italia barbara ... remota e inculta*” (ibid.). In addition, D’Annunzio’s contacts with French Decadence and his awareness and openness to novelty in the literature and arts, about which he wrote numerous articles, made him absorb various aesthetics and tastes which he then developed into a style of his own.²³ The official inauguration of Italian decadence was marked in 1889 when D’Annunzio, only five years after Huysmans’ *A rebours*, wrote his novel *Il piacere*. The main character, Andrea Sperelli, was represented in the novel as a poet, a painter and an amateur musician who was trying “to live life by imitating art” (*bisogna fare la propria vita, come si fa un’opera d’arte*) (Mutterle 1980: 19). The aesthetic which lies behind this expression, advocating the so called *dolce vita* life style (Adams 1968: 260), in many ways celebrated the vogue for decadent attitudes, in a similar way to what Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* would do in the following year.²⁴ For these reasons, both characters, D’Annunzio’s Sperelli and Huysmans’ Des Esseintes were, in fact, to become the heralds of the Decadent era.

One of the curious elements in the novel is the protagonist’s longing to “find a form of a Modern Poem”.²⁵ The reason why this is significant is because it reflects D’Annunzio’s own preoccupation, to use his own words, his “most lasting ambition”. In dedicating his next novel, *Il trionfo della morte* (1894), to one of his closest friends, the painter Francesco Paolo Michetti,

²² For a discussion of the elements of *Scapigliatura*’s sensibility which directly link with the aesthetics of Decadence, see Chapter IV in Del Principe’s study, entitled “From Scapigliatura to Decadentismo: looking forward”, pp. 110-132.

²³ A selection of D’Annunzio’s critical writings on music can be found in the last section (appendix) of Tedeschi’s volume *D’Annunzio e la musica*, pp. 139 – 220.

²⁴ The expression “la dolce vita” or “sweet life”, according to *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (1999, revised by Adrian Room, London: Cassell Pub., p. 355) was a phrase which became familiar following Fellini’s film of the same name (1960). It appears that in his article Adams uses this expression with the same meaning, indicating the “life of luxury and self indulgence” which was promoted during the decadent era. Cf. Robert Adams 1968, “The Operatic Novel: Joyce and D’Annunzio”, in *New Looks at Italian Opera: Essays in Honour of Donald J. Grout*, Ed. by William W. Austin, New York: Cornell University Press, pp. 260-281.

²⁵ The words from *Il piacere* are quoted by Mutterle; the rest of the quotation is as follows: “una lirica veramente moderna nel contenuto ma vestita di tutte le antiche eleganze, profonda e limpida, appassionata e pura, forte e composta”, see Anco Marzio Mutterle 1980, *Gabriele D’Annunzio: Introduzione e guida allo studio dell’opera dannunziana*, Florence: Le Monnier, p. 20.

the writer attached an elaborate “programme” to it in which, while introducing his novel, he explained his “ideal book of modern prose” which:

... [W]hile rich in its tones and rhythms like a poem - combining in its style the most diverse energies of the written word - might bring into harmony all the multiplicities of knowledge and all the multiplicities of enigma; which might mingle the precisions of science with the seductions of the dream; which might seem not to imitate, but to *continue* Nature; and, free from the shackles of the story, might carry within itself, created with all the means available to literary art, the particular vitality – sensual, sentimental and intellectual – of a human existence located at the very center of the universal cosmic life. [Adams, “The Operatic Novel”, p. 263]

Among the rest of the text in this “programme”, along with the elaborate description of the structure of his novel, D’Annunzio pointed out his particular efforts to “render inner life in its richness and diversity” and “above all, the resolve to make a work of beauty and poetry, a plastic and symphonic prose, rich in imagery and music” (Adams 1968: 264). Yet, as for the actual theme of *Il trionfo della morte*, it was a “slow, almost eventless disintegration of a personality” (ibid.: 26). The peculiarities such as the hidden, “inner life” of the drama, the importance of “rich imagery” and most of all of music, have fascinated those who read, studied or simply knew D’Annunzio. In the case of *Il trionfo della morte*, it is interesting to note the impact it had on James Joyce.²⁶ Even more important for our study, is the appeal D’Annunzio’s work must have had on Silvio Benco; several aspects of it will be discussed in the following section.

ii. *La Falena and the atmosphere of Decadence*

The feminine ideal suggested in the writings of the Decadent era is reflected in Benco’s image of an obsessive, dangerous ‘lady of the night’, the *sorcière* he created with Falena. In the literature of the time, artists often viewed woman in a way which emphasised the “destructive nature of passion, [and] the dangerous aspects of a love that delivers men over, bound hand and foot, to a creature who is not only futile, but fundamentally immoral, cruel, and perverse” (Pierrot 1981: 126). The mistrust of the female sex, which was so prevalent at the time, tormenting artists’ consciousness, caused an endless recurrence of themes which dealt with sexuality. Benco’s novels or his libretti were no exception. The sensual theme was often presented in the form of a more cruel, aggressive or hysterical kind. As Pierrot emphasised, the role of woman in such stories was constantly propounded in two images: woman as *femme*

²⁶ See Adams, “The Operatic Novel”.

fatale or woman as victim (Pierrot 1988: 138-9). An exceptional sensitivity to eroticism was another feature which was fundamental to the decadents. In the view of Mario Praz, this was the “most characteristic aspect” of the whole Romantic movement, as well as of Decadence. As a confirmation, his *Romantic Agony* traced a whole series of “states of mind” and “peculiarities of behaviour”, as well as numerous “fatal women” present in literature or in the figurative arts. The various types included in his study are, for example, the courtesan, *femme diable*, *la belle dame sans merci* or the “superwoman”.

To an extent, the perception of Praz could be extended further: looking into the literature at the end of the century, the *femme fatale* appears to be one of its most important and most frequently encountered characters. In comparison to the French writers, for example, the popularity of eroticism or perverted sexuality has been less present or less developed in Italian literature. Experimental steps, as was discussed earlier, can be detected in the works of some of the *scapigliati*, as in Tarchetti’s *Fosca*. It was primarily D’Annunzio whose work consistently kept introducing such subjects.²⁷ His poetry and fictional writing was replete with the most morbid and voluptuous scenes, including themes such as “blood rituals, madness, incest, tragic heroism, violent passion” (Dombroski 1996: 475). A survey of them is given in the study of Mario Praz. A similar contribution to such decadent themes can be found in the writings of Benco.

The creature Benco invented in his libretto of *Falena*, the violent and licentious woman who wanders around during the night time, often into the depths of our dreams, is one who has always existed in literature and arts, in particular in myths and legends. The representations of such figures had numerous forms, from the monstrous, mythological “Medusan” type, which fascinated Shelley, for example, to the legendary “Lilith”. Described as a “beautiful and licentious unmarried harlot, who seduces men in streets and fields”, Lilith was also known as a “princess of the *succubi*”, the female demon who desires men while they are asleep.²⁸ Something of Falena’s phantasmal look corresponds to these prototypes. Furthermore, it can be recognised in the following passage, in a short dialogue between Faust and Mephistopheles, in which the devil warns Faust about the appearance of a woman he sees in front of him:

“Let it be – pass on –

No good can come of it – it is not well

²⁷ It was Praz who traced (in the second edition of his book) the examples of the *femme fatale* in the writings of the *scapigliati*: he remarked on Boito’s Asteria (in *Nerone*), or the type of woman who appears in Camerana’s verses: “it is the woman with dark hair and eyes, pale, mysterious, perhaps criminal...”, see Praz 1951, *The Romantic Agony*, p. 460.

²⁸ Discussion of these feminine symbols can be found in particular in chapters I and IV of Praz’s study. For the description of the myth of Lilith, see Praz 1933, *The Romantic Agony*, p. 272, footnote 1.

*To meet it – it is an enchanted phantom,
A lifeless idol; with its numbing look
It freezes up the blood of man and they
Who meet its ghastly stare are turned to stone,
Like those who saw Medusa”.*²⁹

As for *Falena*, it must be pointed out that the title itself is not merely a name. The word *Falena*, like the character herself, has several meanings which need to be explored. For example, the etymological and demonological meaning, the elements of symbolism which it suggests, and the aspect of the *femme fatale* which it absorbed from and shared with the decadents. Even in her appearance *Falena* reflects the climate of the time: her beauty is hidden and mysterious, she radiates a sense of foreboding and possesses ‘satanic’ features. This kind of image was often visible, for example, in the followers of Pre-Raphaelite art, known to have greatly influenced French decadent literature.³⁰ Some resemblance can be seen to the artwork of Sir Edward Burne-Jones (his painting *The beguiling of Merlin*, 1874) [see **Illustration n. 3**], or the drawing by John William Waterhouse (*La Belle dame sans merci*, 1893) [**Illustration n. 5**]. The Pre-Raphaelite images of women comprise a series of “Nubile maidens”, “Fallen Magdalenas”, “Sorceresses” and “Pale bodies of death”, for example.³¹ Nevertheless, the most suitable or the closest physical image of *Falena* can be perceived in the artwork of Gustave Moreau, one of the main representatives of decadent figurative art, who was particularly inspired and influenced by Gustave Flaubert’s *femme fatale*. Two of his most famous paintings, *Salomé* and *L’Apparition*, seem to reflect the kind of atmosphere which envelops Benco’s *Falena*.³² It is worth noting that the name of Gustave Moreau was chosen by Massimo Mila, for example, in discussing the setting and the atmosphere of act II of the opera.³³

²⁹ The quotation which Praz uses is Shelley’s translation of Goethe’s *Faust*, see Praz 1933, *The Romantic Agony*, p. 26.

³⁰ Pre-Raphaelites are often said to have influenced decadent sensibility, as well as the Aesthetic school in Britain (Oscar Wilde in particular). Pierrot in his study mentions, for example, Burne-Jones as well as the Swiss painter, Arnold Böcklin, the two artists who have influenced Maeterlinck and Benco, respectively (cf. Chapter V). The several instances in which Pierrot discusses visual art in relation to the period of decadence can be found in Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination*, pp. 16-22, 41, 143, 198-203.

³¹ The main sources on Pre-Raphaelite art were the books by Jan Marsh 1998, *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art*, 2nd ed., London: Phoenix & Illustrated, and Christopher Wood 1997, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, 4th ed., London: Phoenix & Illustrated. The examples of figurative art used for this study have been taken from these two sources.

³² For the reproduction of *Salomé*, see Derrick Puffett 1989, *Richard Strauss: Salome*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 13.

³³ The comment is made in the Programme book of the *Teatro comunale “Giuseppe Verdi”* in Trieste, in the season 1974/75 which staged *La Falena*.



Illustration 5: *La Belle dame sans merci* (1893), John William Waterhouse

Benco's *Falena* fused all of these features, a compendium of which can be deduced from the writer's own explanation of the story given in his article, “Le origini della Falena”.³⁴ In this essay, written some three years after the original libretto, we learn that Falena was for Benco a “vision which came to his mind” (*una visione che mi passava in mente*), a vision which, in the drama, was to become a “pictorial symbol of the Night” and of its nightmares:

Era una visione che mi passava in mente, musicalissima per una musica irrequieta e bizzarra: visione che, entrando nel drama, vi divenne come un simbolo pittorico della Notte, e della sua azione

³⁴ “Le origini della *Falena*”, published in *L'Indipendente*, 24 February 1899. A reprint of this article can be found in various other sources, such as in Benco, *Scritti di critica*, pp. 56-61, and in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 176-181.

perturbatrice - mediante il senso dell'ignoto e l'angoscia - sulle [sic] semplici ed esaltante creature umane. [Benco, “Le origini della *Falena*”, in *L'Indipendente*, 24 February 1899]

[It was a vision which came to my mind, the most musical for a restless and bizarre kind of music: a vision which, once entering the drama, became like a pictorial symbol of the Night, and of the disturbances it created – through the sense of the unknown and the anxiety it causes – in simple and sensitive human beings.]

In addition, Benco revealed that he imagined the drama to be an “activity in dream”:

azione in sogno è stato ciò che mi si mosse dentro e che io cercai di tradurre....

[activity in dream was what I felt and what I tried to interpret.]

In associating the appearances and the existence of *Falena* with the night, and by placing the actual drama in the realm of *dream* (through Stellio's subconscious, while he is asleep), Benco's story comes close to the Symbolists. As was mentioned earlier, Benco's fascination with the subconscious world, with its unknown forces, as well as with dreams, was an interest he shared with many artists at the end of the century. The choice of a legendary milieu for the story allowed him to keep the overall mood vague and mysterious and to set a slow but intense pace of action. It was a kind of drama which was subtle and suggestive, and evolved more in the characters' minds than in reality. In other words, it permitted Benco to conceive the *inner* drama he wished for, and to have an “open” ending in which the fate of the protagonists is mysterious and inconclusive. Among the other symbolic elements in the story, we can point to the setting, placed in a misty forest, an obscure place with dark powers. Another strong impression is given in the scene with the stains of blood: once King Stellio committed the murder, they cannot be washed from his hands.

Another curious aspect of *Falena* which relates to its symbolism is the question of her identity. *Who* is *Falena*? In his imagination, Benco saw her as a “night spirit”, a ghost which disturbs people in their dreams and then, by a metamorphosis, vanishes with the dawn. Research into whether such a creature ever existed revealed that, in fact, Benco's character had much in common with what the etymological definition of it implied.³⁵ By standard terminology, “*falena*” or also “*favilla*”, is usually translated as a “moth”. In the 19th century it used to denote numerous species of night butterflies attracted by the light, and as such was often used in the poetry of Arrigo Boito and Giovanni Pascoli. It frequently had a symbolical significance, representing a courtesan or a harlot who seduces at night. As can be seen, Benco kept

³⁵ The definition is taken from UTET, vol. V, p. 590.

“falena’s” main symbolic characteristics, even some of the features which clearly allude to a ‘butterfly’; several examples will be discussed in the following section of this chapter. The aspects which he altered regard the importance of the light: in Benco’s story, Falena loses her strength with the dawn and the daylight forces her to vanish. Another difference between the symbolism of “falena” and Benco’s depiction of her can be seen in her additional phantasmal and demonic qualities. This rich make-up which Benco created with his protagonist could be the reason why some authors have investigated the phenomenon of such a creature and its relationship with demonology. A curious explanation can be seen in the following quotation:

In demonologia, la Falena potrebbe definirsi uno spirito incubo. Una creatura infernale, partorita dalla notte; capace d’attirare gli uomini con lusinghe d’abisso, succhiarne a poco a poco la forza vitale, congiungersi con essi in un rapporto maledetto ma pieno d’estenuante voluttà, estinguerne il corpo e dannarne l’anima. [Isotta, *I sentieri della musica*, p. 295]

[In demonology, Falena could be defined as an incubus. [She] is an infernal creature, brought forth by the night; [she is] able to attract men with the allurements of the abyss, to drain very slowly their vitality, uniting with them in an accursed intercourse full of enfeebling sensual pleasure, to extinguish their body and damn their soul.]

Isotta’s comment, emphasizing the *femme fatale* aspect of Benco’s protagonist supports the view that the story deals primarily with eroticism. Another curious point which transpires from the author’s article refers to the whole Decadent era:

Fu il personaggio femminile stesso ad assumere ... la funzione della ‘fiamma che attira e brucia’. ... Da *Samson et Dalila* a *Carmen*, da *Parsifal* (Kundry) a *Salammbô* di Reyer a *Erodiade* di Massenet a *Salome*, ... l’opera di quei tempi non ci sembra fatta che di mangiatrici di uomini. [ibid.]

[It was the female character which took upon herself the role of a ‘flame which attracts and burns’. From *Samson and Dalila* to *Carmen*, from *Parsifal* (Kundry) to *Salammbô* by Reyer, to *Erodiade* by Massenet, to *Salome*, ... the opera of that time seems to be mainly made of eaters of men.]

Isotta’s view should be looked at, at this point, because it draws attention to an important issue. Although internationally, the popularity of themes such as the *femme fatale* was indisputable, in Italy such topics were mainly promoted by D’Annunzio. Thus, the novelty and the importance of Benco’s *Falena* is more significant if we realise that there were not many “falenas” in the Italian operatic repertoire at the time.³⁶

³⁶ See Paolo Isotta 1978, *I sentieri della musica*, Milan: Mondadori. For more on the operatic repertory see the Time line 3 and 4, Appendix C.

The subject which does stand out is D’Annunzio’s pastoral tragedy *La figlia di Iorio* (1903), since it was rewritten as a libretto (by D’Annunzio himself) and set to music (by Franchetti, in 1906). Regarded as one of the poet’s best achievements for the theatre, *La figlia di Iorio* has inspired much scholarly investigation. The genesis of the story reveals that the incentive for the writing of the tragedy goes back to an incident which occurred in a small village of Abruzzo. Witnessed by D’Annunzio and by the painter Francesco Paolo Michetti, who was D’Annunzio’s lifelong friend, the event involved the sudden appearance of a young, distressed, screaming woman, chased and cursed by inebriated, lustful men. The incident left a strong impression on Michetti, and became the inspiration for his painting entitled *La figlia di Iorio* (1895). Likewise, it became a part of D’Annunzio’s play of the same title.³⁷

Let us outline briefly the story of the tragedy. The plot evolves around Mila di Codra, who is the outcast daughter of Iorio, and Aligi, a young man who is about to marry Vienda. When on one occasion Mila suddenly bursts into Aligi’s house in order to escape from the inebriated men who were chasing her, Aligi is at once fascinated by her. Although he is by now married to Vienda, Mila and Aligi run away. When his sister Ornella and his father Lazaro come to look for them, imploring Aligi to return home, the event turns into a tragedy: the old Lazaro attempts to rape Mila, and is killed by his son. As Aligi is brought home to be forgiven by his mother, Mila arrives, taking the blame of the murder upon herself: she claims that she “enchanted” Aligi, thus releasing him from the charge. Aligi curses her as a “witch!” (*strega*), before she is taken away to be burned.

The similarities which can be found in *La figlia di Iorio* and *Falena*, begin with the mysterious atmospheres surrounding the enchanted and bewitched characters. *La figlia di Iorio* is set in the “legendary world of the Abruzzi, a sensuous and violent land, bound by age-old rituals and superstitions”³⁸ and myths, while the legend of *Falena* is set on some indefinite European coast in early Christian times. Both Falena and Mila were seductive female characters endowed with supernatural power. In both tragedies, the woman was the protagonist and the cause of the tragic finale. Characterised as cruel, fascinating, irresistible, and of infamous reputation, both Mila and Falena are ‘demonic’, like witches, an aspect which again emphasizes further the weakness of men. By contrast, Stellio (in *Falena*) and Aligi (in *Figlia*) were fragile, reluctant,

³⁷ The origins of *La figlia di Iorio* are discussed in the article by Raffaella Bertazzoli, “*La figlia di Iorio* da Michetti a D’Annunzio”, in *Annali d’Italianistica* 5, pp. 161-178.

³⁸ Robert Dombroski 1996, “Writer and the society in the New Italy”, in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 476.

as it were, intoxicated. They acted almost involuntarily with thoughts and feelings provoked by something outside of their control.³⁹

IV.4 Libretto

i. Comments on the drama: “activity in dream” (Benco)

The Decadent movement was nocturnal and avoided the harsh sunlight of conscience. Its unspeakable acts and intoxicating dreams required the cover of dark. What light the Decadents needed the moon could supply. [Schmidgall, *Literature as Opera*, p. 254]

The fact that Benco with *Falena*, the very first libretto he had written, decided to create a drama which would in large part evolve in dream rather than in reality, indicates that, right from the start of his career as a librettist, he was interested in settings which were new and unconventional, themes which were uncommon for the operatic stage. Being a novice in the task might have also encouraged such an attitude. Until he met Smareglia, Benco's main occupation was writing articles on arts and politics, while developing his own literary aptitude in writing novels which very much belonged to the atmosphere of the fin-de-siècle. In approaching libretto writing, Benco designed the legend of *Falena* as a text for music which he himself had described in somewhat unusual terms: for him, *Falena* represented the kind of theatre which in itself had a “musical soul”. In the same article, “Le origini della *Falena*”, he explained further his concept of the libretto, insisting on its quest for music:

Io sono adunque passato ... a quella concezione di teatro che già avesse in se stessa un'anima musicale, che portasse figure, effetti e momenti tali da non poter essere senza l'elevazione alla idealità. Dare un disegno di movimenti ideali, che armonizzassero ai ritmi, è stato il mio intento. Azione in sogno è stato ciò che mi si mosse dentro e che io cercai di tradurre.... [Benco, “Le origini della *Falena*”]

[I therefore moved on ... to conceive the kind of theatre which would already have a musical soul, which would contain figures, effects and such moments as could not exist without being elevated to perfection. My intention was to provide a design of ideal movements, which would be in harmony with the rhythms [of the music]. Activity in dream, that was what I felt inside and what I tried to convey.]

³⁹ Further similarities between Benco's *Falena* and *La figlia di Iorio* (such as their oneiric and symbolic language, or the drama being conceived through a series of suggestive images and as “recitation and movement of dance” (il ‘dramma’ è dizione e movimento di danza) can be found in the discussion of D'Annunzio's theatrical works by Anna Barsotti 1978, “Il ‘teatro di poesia’ ”, in *Rivista Italiana di Drammaturgia* 9/10, pp. 32-36.

As a starting point, in order to realise his concept Benco thought of the image of Falena. In his view such an apparition could inspire a variety of musical movements as the elements of a “dramatic dance”. In Benco’s words:

Mi parve che, applicata alla plastica della scena, quest’immagine svolazzante nella fluida ampiezza dei suoi veli intrisi di tenebre, sotto l’ispirazione continua di stimoli senza freno d’intelletto, potesse fornire una serie di linee nuove, di atteggiamenti curiosi ed esuberanti, di vivacità di gesto corrispondente a varietà di mosse musicali, quasi elementi d’una sorta di drammatica danza.

[It seems to me that, when applied to the plasticity of the scene, such a fluttering image, in the fluid vastness of its veils immersed in darkness, an image which continuously stimulates and inspires the intellect, could provide a series of new shapes, of curious and exuberant attitudes, of vigorous gestures which correspond to a variety of musical movements, almost elements of a kind of dramatic dance.]

The way Benco laid out the plot of *Falena* resulted in a drama which was, as he said, “more outlined than developed” (Mario Smareglia 1934: 367). In fact, when he first handed the libretto to Smareglia, the text was so short that the composer saw the whole opera ending in just over twenty minutes.⁴⁰ Although such a miscalculation by Benco was surely due to his inexperience in writing a text for an opera, what remains clear is his intention to create a work which would be “short, fast and urgent” (breve, rapida, incalzante), portraying a kind of “turmoil” which disturbed the tranquil life of a small, religious community; perturbation of the most “wild” kind.⁴¹ Looking closely at the libretto, and at the way in which Benco structured the plot, we can notice that he had, in fact, *outlined* the plot in such a way that the events which precede Falena’s appearance bear no dramatic weight. When she does appear, however, our attention is completely captured: act I ends with Stellio falling into a “magic dream”; in act II we are in Stellio’s dream; in act III, Stellio and the night ‘wake up’, making Falena disappear. Instead of an effective development of plot, there are incidents; as Isotta remarked, “the drama proceeds in transitions rather than in starkly contrasting situations”, and our attention moves “from the events to the shadows of events”.⁴²

⁴⁰ Cf. Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 48.

⁴¹ The comments are taken from Benco’s article on the origins of *Falena*; the full quotation is as follows: “ho avuto di mira ... un’opera breve, rapida, incalzante, atta a rappresentare una specie di turbine scatenato in mezzo alla vasta e religiosa calma d’un popolo adorante il suo Iddio ...”.

⁴² The full quotation is “nell’opera il dramma s’insinua per trapassi, più che per brusche contrapposizioni L’estenuata lunghezza di questi trapassi sposta l’attenzione dalle cose all’ombra delle cose”, in Isotta, *I sentieri della musica*, p. 297.

One way in which Benco created restlessness in the plot was by employing melancholy topics in the dialogues, for example, in the opening scene between Albina and the young girls around her, or with the sailor’s song, which is heard to “arise from the sea”, with a particularly tragic tone and text. There are small crescendos which build up the tension of the drama primarily through the character’s own agonies. Particularly illuminating is the case of Albina. Throughout the story her character is depicted as unsettled, frightened by some immaterial forces; this can be seen on several occasions when she mentions the continuous nightmares she has. Although Albina tells Uberto and Stellio about it, and although her comments are overheard, they linger in the atmosphere as some kind of ominous premonition of fate. The effect recalls the atmosphere of Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas*; in his play, “Destiny” is viewed as “the most important member of the dramatis personae” (Youens 1988: 60). This kind of tension in Benco’s libretto is carried further when Albina and the King finally declare their love for each other. The poet sets this scene in a dark and eerie ambience, in which Stellio embraces Albina “almost without touching”. As the King announces that Albina will be his bride, she replies “confused”:

Mi conturba ogni accento / ogni olezzo di fior ... come uno spirito / vagante per la sera [libretto 1928, p. 19]

[Every tone disturbs me/ every scent of flower ... as a spirit / wandering at night time.]

Once *Falena* arrives the drama accelerates, focusing henceforth on her own and Stellio’s state of mind. In order to carry out such a drama the poet structured the libretto in three acts, each conceived as a single scene displaying what he described as “settings which are dominated by a certain feeling”. In Benco’s words, some of the scenes included are, for example, “the impressionability of Albina, the thrill of the night which spreading through the community, Stellio’s orgy, Albina’s cry in her soul, the turmoil of the escape, Morio’s wisdom, [and] the death scene and the sun shining on death”.⁴³ Laid out in evocative language, the poet’s libretto “artfully combined decadent and symbolist elements”.⁴⁴

⁴³ The quotation of Benco is as follows: “... l’impressività d’Albina, il brivido della notte che si propaga in tutto un popolo, l’orgia di Stellio, il pianto di Albina nella sua anima, il tumulto della fuga, la saggezza di Morio, la morte e il sole sopra la morte...”, in Benco, “Le origini della *Falena*”.

⁴⁴ Matteo Sansone 1992c, “Antonio Smareglia”, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. by Stanley Sadie, vol. 4, pp. 417-418.



Illustration 6: The sketch for Albina, 1899. Civico Museo Teatrale “C. Schmid”.

ii. The revisions of *Falena*: unpublished letters

Vedrai, caro Benco, che ora faremo una *Falena* come tu forse la vedevi nella fantasia.⁴⁵

[You will see, dear Benco, that now we will make a *Falena* as perhaps you imagined it.]

Written in 1902, several years after *Falena* had its first performances in Venice (1897) and in Trieste (1899), Smareglia’s comment gives the impression that the two of them were still writing the opera. The survey of the genesis of Benco’s libretto reveals that the text went through numerous changes before assuming its final form, from the time it was first written until the 1920s. Different versions of the libretto which have been published (in 1897, 1911 and

⁴⁵ From Smareglia’s unpublished letter B. C. 1254 written around 1902. See Appendix B.

1928, for example) allow us to follow the modifications in detail, at the same time enabling us to gather the most complete picture of the story. These are the kind of alterations which do not affect the main aspects of the legend in terms of its development or the main ideas it embodies. Instead, they provide us with an inventory of transformations of the plot which were subsequently adopted.

One example is the opening of act I: in its original version, Benco imagined that it should be played out in a more lively and spirited mood. Originally the poet depicted Albina and her maids cheerfully reminiscing of the times they all went sailing. They recalled that on one occasion, a hurricane threatened their boat, but the King was with them and saved their lives. Besides revealing the King’s admiration for Albina, the comments of the girls succeeded in making her smile, which then puts her father in good spirits. In spite of the fact that Benco, as late as 1912, thought that the opera needed and “lacked” this kind of “joyous” scene, the scene was changed on Smareglia’s suggestion.⁴⁶ It is likely that Benco’s argument that the scene would be in “contrast” with the following episode involving Uberto, seemed unconvincing to the composer: looking into the first version of the libretto we can notice that there is no real contrast since Uberto simply continues conversing with Albina and her friends (about the hunters returning home). In the revised version Benco altered the episode by keeping Albina melancholy, sad and inconsolable, thus establishing, from the very start, the gloomy atmosphere of the plot. A substantial alteration can also be noticed in the scene which followed, the capture of the thief. To this episode Benco added more space in the plot: the newer version involved a chorus, creating a more violent scene and further building up the tension.⁴⁷

The modifications of *Falena*, discussed between Benco and Smareglia, have been partially revealed in the correspondence between the two artists. The published edition of some of the letters which Smareglia received or sent, grants us only a limited view of their collaboration.⁴⁸ It includes no letter which discusses step by step the making of the opera. The three letters from Benco to Smareglia which do discuss some details of the fashioning of *Falena*, provide more of a flavour of their arguments.⁴⁹ For example, in a letter written by Benco in 1903, we learn about a series of verses which the poet added to act III. One of the scenes which was significantly extended in its new layout was the dialogue between Stellio and Falena: their final episode, set

⁴⁶ In the same letter we learn that the poet disagreed with Smareglia about making “Uberto more interesting”. See Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 69.

⁴⁷ From letter B. C. 1254, see Appendix B.

⁴⁸ The published correspondence includes a selection of letters which belonged to Smareglia’s grandson Silvio Smareglia, and some of the letters kept in the archive of Museo Teatrale C. Schmidl in Trieste. No letter was included from the archive of Biblioteca Civica.

⁴⁹ The letters were written in 1903 and 1912. See Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, pp. 32-33, 70-72. A part of discussion of the three published letters is included in Chapter VI.

in the first half of act III, before they are found by Morio. Although nowhere in Benco’s letter do we learn about the reasons of these alterations, there is a *unpublished* letter, written by Smareglia to Benco around 1903, which clarifies the picture, revealing why the composer was not at all satisfied with the layout of the scene. As Smareglia put it:

[La scena] deve venire ampliata svolgendo maggior ricchezza, varietà e forza di passione, di scatti, con qualche frase violenta specialmente per Falena, qualche tirata melodica o drammatica, perché come sta la scena è povera, meschina e la Falena in questo atto non riesce sulla scena ad ottenere impressione alcuna.⁵⁰

[The scene has to be expanded, in order to appear richer and to contain some variety and intensity of passion, of outbursts, with some violent phrases especially for Falena, with some melodious or dramatic gesture, because as it is the scene is poor, miserable, and Falena does not leave any impression in this act.]

Originally Benco imagined the scene as being concise: it depicted the King and Falena arriving from the woods, appearing agitated and nervous as they hear the voices of hunters calling for Stellio. The scene as such turned out too short, lacked *dramatic* interest, and provided only a partial understanding of the situation. Furthermore, it allowed the composer limited space to develop it as powerfully and intensely in music as he needed to. As we find out from another unpublished letter by Smareglia, the composer was certain that Benco’s new version was suitable:

I cambiamenti o meglio, aggiunte alla *Falena* mi piacciono, è proprio quello che mancava e quindi ci voleva: così l’azione della protagonista riuscirà chiara, più drammatica e il quadro sulla scena diventa completo.⁵¹

[I like the changes, or better, the additional verses in *Falena*, it is precisely what was lacking and therefore needed: in this way the protagonist’s action will prove clear, more dramatic and the whole scene then becomes complete.]

The examination of these verses shows that Benco elaborated the dialogue in greater detail, adding twenty-five lines which revealed that Falena was becoming more vulnerable, somehow ‘different’, a fact which agitated the King even more.⁵² Their argument proceeded, revealing the frenzy of their souls, until Falena finally vanished. The elaboration of this episode provided the

⁵⁰ See letter B. C. 1255 in Appendix B.

⁵¹ See letter B. C. 1266 in Novel, “‘Visione musicalissima’”, p. 48. This article draws the attention to and transcribes in full several of the letters which are kept in the Biblioteca Civica in Trieste.

⁵² See Benco 1897, *La Falena: leggenda in tre atti*, pp. 54-55.

composer with the opportunity to evoke it through music with particular power, both in the orchestra and the vocal parts.

The detailed investigation of Smareglia’s correspondence confirms the fact that the material of major importance for our research is the group of letters which have not yet been published.⁵³ Many such letters contain vital information about the two artists, their relationship or their career, and were essential for carrying out the present study. More important for this chapter is the fact that most of these letters include elaborate discussions on revisions of the *Falena* libretto. These alterations are worth studying for two main reasons. Firstly, they reveal details in the story which would not have been known to us otherwise. Secondly, most of the unpublished letters were written *by* Smareglia (dictating to his sons or students) to Benco. The letters reveal, as our earlier example has shown, that the composer was not quite satisfied with Benco’s text and kept demanding, over a period of time, various changes. Even though this was, at times, a matter of changing either isolated verses or their dramatic functioning, the fact is that this hardly corresponds to Benco’s remarks in his *Ricordi* about Smareglia almost never demanding alterations of the libretti he was working on.⁵⁴ Instead, the discovery of numerous letters confirms that Smareglia took a much more active part in the fashioning and the development of the libretto than Benco would lead us to believe.

A great source of additional information on the drama resides in Benco’s stage directions. One curious example is *Falena*’s physical appearances, and her movements, which in their original form Benco imagined as close to a “butterfly-like” creature.⁵⁵ From what transpires from several letters we learn that this was to be changed, following Smareglia’s suggestion. As can be seen in act I, in Benco’s original version, at the moment Albina tells her father of her bad dreams, she describes her vision as a creature “with wings”. The following lines,

Sai ... le notti / agitate da sogni ... conturbate / da uno sbattere d’ale .../ strano... strano,

[You know ...the nights / agitated by dreams ...disturbed /by the beat of wings.../ strange...strange]

were changed to:

ho tocco il cuore / d’un presagio di tutte le mie notti; / vidi una donna in sogno, strana, strana⁵⁶

⁵³ Among the rest of the unpublished letters, the most significant are included in Appendix B.

⁵⁴ See Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 79. Also see Chapter VI section VI. 2.

⁵⁵ An example of Benco’s particularly telling stage direction for *Falena* can be quoted from the footnote in the 1897 edition of the libretto: “L’azione dell’ignota ... ha un carattere d’irrequietezza proterva: muove di qua e di là, sempre agitando le sue lunghe vesti, con passo leggero, ma imperiosa nel portamento, alta la testa e le pupille concentrate con potenza magnetica negli occhi di Stellio. Lo scatto ferino, il riso sardonico, il gesto vivace e pittoresco delle mani la distinguono da ogni creatura umana”, see Benco 1897, *La Falena*, p. 20.

⁵⁶ Cf. the editions of *Falena* from 1897 and Benco 1928, *La Falena: leggenda in tre atti di Silvio Benco. Musica di Antonio Smareglia*. The page numbers of all the quoted examples refer to one of these two editions.

[I found in my heart / an ever-nocturnal premonition/ I saw a woman in my dream, strange, strange.]

The reason why the composer preferred to eliminate all which could indicate the “butterfly” features of Falena, or of her “flying”, was that in his opinion this would give the wrong impression of her, making her character too trivial in the eyes of the audience.⁵⁷ This was explained further in the letter, in connection with act III, in which Smareglia persuaded Benco to change the stage directions which accompany Falena’s vanishing:

Elimina lo svolazzare che pure ha dato luogo a malevoli e sbagliate interpretazioni sul personaggio. Via pura il vola ... Cambiare quindi l’idea: “... è una grande farfalla che vola per le [...]” che è facilmente sostituibile con altro verso che non stabilisca la farfalla. [from letter B. C. 1255, see Appendix B]

[Eliminate the fluttering which caused malicious and mistaken interpretations of her character. Get rid of the flying ... Thus change the idea: “... it is a big butterfly which flies around [...]”; this is easily interchangeable with another line which does not firmly point at the butterfly.]

From what can be discerned in Smareglia’s letters, besides their diverse concept of Falena’s outward appearance, the whole scene in act I, involving the sudden appearance of Falena and the terror she causes were viewed differently by the librettist and the composer. Similar to other instances, in Benco’s original layout, the scene was too concise: following his frightening encounter with Falena, Stellio immediately called Uberto, telling him what happened, and imploring Uberto to protect him from the night that is ahead of him.⁵⁸ The composer, however, was not content with such a concept.⁵⁹ Smareglia felt that Falena needed to be further elaborated as a character and to be given more verses which would underline her voluptuous and seductive nature. Furthermore, she would cast a spell on the King, gradually by the end of the scene inducing him to sleep, before then disappearing. According to Smareglia, in this way there would be an opportunity for her to be given a “warmer” expression, in contrast to the impression she left when she first came into sight:

⁵⁷ The excerpt from the letter is as follows: “...per eliminare tutto ciò che ha della farfalla o del volare ciò che trasse in errore e in malevoli commenti sul personaggio di Falena”, see Appendix B, letter B. C. 1255.

⁵⁸ Although the scene was changed, Benco kept the idea of Uberto guarding Stellio at night: we can see this from Falena’s narrative at the beginning of act II.

⁵⁹ Looking at the versification of this scene, we can notice that Benco extended the scene from 31 to 60 lines uttered by Falena.

Così la Falena avrà una frase calda di carattere voluttoso, insinuante che contrasterà moltissimo col carattere della sua entrata, e metterà subito in vista anche la parte sensuale del suo essere perché appunto il nuovo brano dovrebbe essere pieno di promesse insinuanti, voluttuose, sensuali.⁶⁰

[This way Falena will express herself in a voluptuous, insinuating way which will be very much in contrast with her character when she first appeared, and it will immediately make obvious the sensual side of her being since the new passage should be full of insinuating, voluptuous, sensual promise... .]

As a result, the scene gained in poetic depth, and was most effectively conveyed in Smareglia's music; the example is discussed in the section on music [see Example IV A]. The composer also intervened with respect to Benco's original concept of Stellio calling for Uberto and the peasants after Falena disappeared. Such an idea seemed “ingenuous and childish” in such a context; the scene needed to be more “effective”. This led him to propose a different solution: once Falena shocks everyone by exerting her powers, she vanishes; all we hear is the voice of Uberto approaching and calling for his daughter. He arrives on stage once Falena is already gone, and hears what happened from Albina.⁶¹ In order to illustrate a sample of Benco's changes for this scene, and to get an idea of the way it gained its dramatic power, we may quote some of Falena's lines from the two libretti:

old version:

Stellio: *Vattene, o chiamo la gente!*
 Falena: *Vuoi la nemica o l'amante, di?*
 Stellio: *La mia gente chiamo!*
 Falena: *Ed io stanotte l'anima/ ti chiamerò dal*
 sonno!... / verrai ... oh se verrai!...
 ...
 [Falena disappears]
 [libretto, p. 22]

new version:

Stellio: *Torna al fosco tuo mondo!*
 Falena: *Dì, non ti sembro io / potente e bella?*
 Dì!
 Stellio: *Orrida è la bellezza / in te!*
 Falena: *Stanotte l'anima / tua chiamerò dal*
 sonno, / dal sonno che su te/ con l'ali
 nere stendo!
 Albina: *Stellio! Da me lontano! Stellio!*
 Falena: *La notte è mia! / E quando impongo un*
 sonno inesorabile / sul ciglio degli
 umani, ei non si destano / se non per
 correre folli tra le tenebre / a cercar le
 mie braccia: Stellio è mio! A la mia
 voce il sonno / con ali carezzevoli / si
 spicca dai lontani / padiglioni de le stelle
 / e dolce dolce su' tuoi cigli cala ...
 ...[the scene continues]
 [libretto, pp. 22-3]

⁶⁰ See Appendix B, letter B. C. 1255.

⁶¹ See Appendix B, letter B. C. 1254.

The scene continues with another twenty-two lines of dialogue relating to Falena’s threats, Stellio’s defeat and Albina’s fear, which were added at Smareglia’s insistence. From the content of the verses, it appears that Smareglia wanted to evoke a more mysterious and poetic idea of Falena’s identity and the overall impression she leaves on the spectator.

Leading in the same direction were the changes which can be noticed in the second and third act of the legend. Particularly different (simplified or, at times, omitted) are the stage directions, which in the original version had been more descriptive and specific. We notice that Benco often gave exact descriptions of the kind of gestures he wanted his character to use on stage. These are often idealised rather than practical. An illustration can be found at the opening of act II; in the original version, Falena was described as lying on the floor near the “purple stack of wood which sends a fiery reflection over her face, *reviving the splendour of her glance*”.⁶² There are numerous other examples from the first edition of the libretto: Falena’s slow vanishing was to be expressed “with gestures of agony” (*con gesti di tormento*, p. 48) and Stellio’s dismay was “torn between hope and extreme terror” (*convulsamente, sbattuto fra una speranza e un estremo terrore*, p. 52). The descriptions of this kind are omitted in the latter version of the libretto. And yet, although Benco’s stage directions might not have proved to be practical, their content is interesting to consider with respect to the possible articulation of music they suggested. There are numerous instances in which the comment seemed to direct the expression of *music*: for the orchestral texture, such as “a moment of perfect silence passes; then we hear two knocks on the wooden door” (*un momento di perfetto silenzio trascorre. Indi alla porta di legno si batte una due volte*, p. 28), act II, while Falena awaits for Stellio, or for Morio’s phrasing “while Morio talks with slow cadence Stellio listens from afar” (*mentre Morio parla con lenta cadenza, Stellio ascolta lontano...*, p. 51).

It should be mentioned that, with respect to the versification of act II and III, an examination reveals various changes of lines, in particular in the dialogues between the King and Falena. As an example, we can look at the verses early in the second act. To build up the erotic tension between them Smareglia insisted on Benco providing additional lines. In wanting to enhance the intensity of their encounter, the new verses needed to be “warm, anxious, of erotic impulse, voluptuous”.⁶³ These kind of suggestions, which can be traced in Smareglia’s letters or found in different versions of the libretti, confirm that the composer was very much involved in conceiving the details of the plot itself, influencing the supply of both the poetic and the dramatic ingredients. These elements would be further evoked in his music.

⁶² “Presso la catasta purpurea, che le manda un riflesso igneo sul viso e le ravviva lo splendor degli sguardi sempre immobili...”. See the first edition of libretto (1897), p. 27.

⁶³ Smareglia demanded “...altri quattro versi circa, caldi, ansiosi, di slancio erotico, voluttuosi...”, see letter B. C. 1276 in Novel, “‘Visione musicalissima’”, p. 53.



Illustration 7: Uberto, from Civico Museo Teatrale “Carlo Schmidl”, Trieste

iii. Literary structure – versification

...[A]vevo sviluppato le situazioni musicali in didascalie e m'ero dimenticato che i personaggi avevano bisogno di versi da poter cantare. [Benco, *Ricordi*, pp. 48-9].

[I had developed the musical situations in the stage directions and had forgotten that the characters needed verses in order to be able to sing].

Before looking into the musical structure of the opera, the aspect of the libretto which remains to be briefly examined is the versification of the libretto. With the emphasis placed so far on the *poetic* features of the text, such as its evocative and symbolic images or the sense of

mystery of the plot, the question which poses itself is, how did such features reflect upon the structure of the text?

An analysis of prosody in *Falena* reveals that among the lines used by Benco overwhelmingly predominant are *endecasillabi* and *settenari*, the two most characteristic meters in Italian verse, which were traditionally used for recitatives and other freer passages in Italian opera libretti. From time to time there are certain sections of the text which are outlined in strict metric patterns, clearly indicating musical forms: for example, particularly suggestive of traditional forms is the “sailor’s song”, placed early on in act I: it is delineated in two strophes of five lines, in which Benco combined *quaternari* and *ottonari* (4+8+4+4+8)[libretto p. 10]. Furthermore, there is an example of a set of nine *settenari*, underlining Albina’s first *arioso* in act I. The only exception in this case is one *endecasillabo*, interpolated between the first and third line of the text:⁶⁴

Stringo sul seno il fiore:
 È nato appena, è piccoletto e bianco A
 E domani morrà! B
 Un bimbo in agonia, C
 Una foglia cadente D
 D'autunno, un cuor di vergine
 D'amor afflitto e stanco: A
 Dentro l'anima mia C
 È tutto una pietà... B

The example of Albina’s lines is notable because, although written in seven-syllable lines, there is no tight metric pattern between them: each verse seems to have its own rhythm, composed with a free distribution of accents. We can note Benco combining all the different verse endings: *sdrucchiolo* (line 6), *tronco* (line 3 and 9) and *piano* (normal) ending (line 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8). Furthermore, the poet coordinated the lines by playing with rhyme: within the inner structure of Albina’s *arioso*, there is “rima tronca” (C), as well as various other types of rhyme, such as “embraced” or “crossed” (*rima abbracciata* and *rima incrociata*). Throughout the libretto we can notice Benco experimenting with rhyme groupings, all of which belong to the established models of Italian prosody and can be found in the poetry at the turn of the century. The examples from the text correspond to those included in the study of W. Th. Elwert; we can identify them under the following terminology: “rima bisticco” (*lento – lamento*, p. 10), “rima

⁶⁴ See the libretto from 1928, p. 9.

derivata” (mare – amare, p. 10), “rima alterna” (L’alme / pietà – palme / beltà, p. 18/19), and others.⁶⁵

For all the originality of the libretto and freedom of form of the text, as can be seen, certain traditional elements remain. Nevertheless, Benco was not much conditioned by traditional libretto writing. He took the advantage of the novelties which were brought to Italian verse by Boito: this can be seen in the extended and flexible use of *versi sciolti*, in his experimenting with other strophic forms and rhyming combinations, as well as in occasional use of archaic words in the libretto. More interestingly, the heavy use of *versi a selva* and their flexible metric patterns give the libretto an almost prose-like fluidity. An example can be seen towards the end of act III, at the moment when, just before Falena vanishes, Stellio recognises that she seems “different”. Benco structured Stellio’s *declamato* in a series of different lines (11+5+6+15+9+6+12+6):

Ah, più quella non sei, tutta di foco,
 Che con gli amplessi,
 Coi canti, coi baci,
 Ardevi, struggevi la vita dell’anima mia!
 Son tremule, son vacillanti
 Le labbra. E tu taci,
 E invan la pupilla, che più non ha impero,
 M’insegna la via!
 [Libretto, p. 54]

On the basis of what has been discussed about the versification of the libretto it can be said that Benco manifested a great amount of creativity and literary freedom in outlining the drama. By 1895, the year in which *Falena* was written, the formal expectations of music (of arias and duets for example) no longer depended so directly on the layout of the libretto as was the case until some ten years earlier. While the music was expected to provide the *continuum*, fusing all the components of the opera in a coherent structure, the scope of the poet was to create the kind of poetry which would grant metric variety and poetic language in order to ‘complement’ the music. Benco represents the tendency of libretto craftsmanship which was encouraged by men of letters such as Boito and Giacosa. From the very beginning he revealed his ability to create drama, as the critic Mila put it “with Boito-like elegance and precious vocabulary”.⁶⁶ These features, the inventing of a completely original dramatic setting, as well as the inherent literary qualities of the text, have earned Benco’s libretto what seems to be the most suitable description of it: “free verses for music” (*versi liberi per musica*) (Corazzol 1995:13). As

⁶⁵ The present discussion as well as the terminology used is based on the book by Th. W. Elwert 1973, *Versificazione italiana dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, 2nd ed., trans. from German by the author, Florence: Le Monnier. Page numeration refers to the 1928 edition of the libretto.

⁶⁶ Massimo Mila’s article in *La Stampa*, 20 March 1975.

Benco had explained himself, in this libretto “everything was aimed at music”. Such “free” design, as will be seen, was reflected in Smareglia’s music.

IV. 5 Music – “drama [conceived] as a part of music”

Ora gli si offriva nella *Falena* una linea di situazioni sinfoniche quale non gli avevano dato i precedenti libretti da lui musicati. [Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 52]

[Now in *Falena* he was offered a series of symphonic situations such as were not provided in the previous libretti he set to music.]

Since Smareglia’s involvement in the design of the *Falena* libretto was so extensive, perhaps more than in any other of the Benco operas, it seems sensible to begin the analysis of the music by looking further into some parts of the plot which were considerably changed upon the composer’s insistence. Besides shedding light upon Smareglia’s conception of *Falena*, these scenes provide an explanation of the question: what did the composer visualise and develop in the plot, and more significantly, how was it all reflected in music?

Benco’s libretto offered Smareglia the kind of story which was essentially *static*: it suggested a series of settings which were, as the poet described them, “dominated by a certain feeling”, as well as containing rich poetic images which aspired to be set to music. The particular importance and space which Benco conferred on music in the story induced him to tailor the scenes and the images in a compressed form, providing a framework for moods, similarly to a ‘poetic programme’.⁶⁷ This kind of conception was to touch the imagination of the composer. Music was, in Benco’s opinion, “the soul” of *Falena*, and it was expected from the composer not only to evoke its atmosphere, interpret its action, but also to *develop* the drama. As can be seen from his article, Benco mentioned that his intention was not to elaborate the dramatic situations: this was to be achieved through music.⁶⁸

The openness of such a concept gave Smareglia a great amount of freedom in confronting *Falena* and its mixture of the supernatural and real spheres. Still, the composer did have a few moments of doubt about it. This is revealed by Benco:

⁶⁷ In a critical review published in *L’Indipendente* on 7 September 1897, an anonymous author described Benco’s libretto as being a “skeleton for a musical poem” (*lo scheletro d’un poema musicale*).

⁶⁸ Cf. Benco, “Le origini della *Falena*”.

Smareglia aveva avuto dapprima non pochi dubbi su la *Falena*, troppo diversa dal genere di melodrammi che aveva animato di musica fino a quegli anni, troppo discosta dalle regole e dalle tradizioni del teatro: tuttavia per le sue possibilità di musica, essa lo affascinava. L'ideale dell'opera sinfonica era stato vagheggiato fin dai tempi intorno al '70 dai musicisti italiani sotto la suggestione del grande sinfonismo drammatico di Wagner... [Benco, *Ricordi*, pp. 51-2]

[At first Smareglia had more than a few doubts about *Falena*, being too different from the kind of melodramas which he had set to music until then, too distant from the rules and traditions of the theatre: still the possibilities it provided for music fascinated him. The ideal of symphonic opera had been aspired to by Italian composers since the 1870s, under the influence of Wagner's great dramatic symphonism... .]

What emerges from Benco's comment is the fact that the drama he sketched was not going to impose conditions on the composer; on the contrary, its “musical situations” were found by Smareglia to be most stimulating. Furthermore, such a poetic text brought out the latent tendencies of Smareglia: for example, his inclination for the symphonic articulation of music, which he had revealed from the very beginning of his studies.⁶⁹ The composer was encouraged to develop the drama by symphonic means, immersing the voices into the all-powerful, dense orchestral texture, following the principles of Wagner's music dramas. Smareglia approached the text by preserving its poetic essence, touching the interior drama in the protagonist's soul. Benco's story was to fuse with and become a part of his music, the result being what many Italian critics called “a purely musical theatre” (*un teatro esclusivamente musicale*).⁷⁰ This concept of Benco's libretto conceived as “being a part of music” (*concetto del dramma come parte della musica*) is mentioned in the study by Perpich (Perpich 1992: 106). The author explained this view by pointing out that besides developing the drama, Smareglia's music was also to fulfil *so* much of what has been left unsaid in the libretto. In other words, the music enveloped the drama; if we consider Benco's own view that *Falena* was written in order to “supply” musical situations, one could almost say that he wrote it in order to *support* Smareglia's musical setting.

As was discussed in the previous section, in the years which followed the opera's premiere Smareglia thought that the text, although infused with tension and disturbances, lacked *dramatic fibre*, and it was this element which the composer found necessary to revise. His

⁶⁹ For example, Smareglia's student work *Leonora, sinfonia descrittiva*, written in 1876 after the ballad of G. A. Bürger.

⁷⁰ See for example Perpich, *Il teatro musicale*, p. 106. Descriptions such as “purely musical theatre” have been adopted by many Italian and international scholars when discussing Smareglia's operas. This aspect of “poetic theatre” is further discussed in Chapter V of this thesis.

suggestions to Benco indicate that he needed to render the plot and the rapidity of its action more elaborate, and with more contrasts of mood. This was particularly the case in the moments of the story which involved Falena. The image of her ghostly appearance and of her mysterious powers, of the ecstatic duet between her and the King animated the composer's imagination to create a series of “musical movements”, such as of Falena's enchantment, Albina's despair, Stellio's frenzy or the lament of the forest. The first fascinating music example of it can be found in act I: Smareglia's musical introduction of Falena.



Illustration 8: The image of *Falena*. The original sketches are kept in Trieste in the Civico Museo Teatrale “Carlo Schmidl”.

i. The image of Falena

The whole opera is articulated in a powerful and densely symphonic musical language. Although the overall impression which *Falena* leaves on the spectator is of what Sansone described as “undramatic oneiric fantasies”, there are certain parts of the plot in which the undramatic element is subdued, and the opera resonates with the most vigorous musico-dramatic life.⁷¹ The most significant dramatic moment of the story is contained in the episode of act I in which Falena suddenly emerges from the forest. In music, the event is heralded by the abrupt, chromatic figures hauntingly reiterated in a crescendo (in violoncelli, bassoon and bass clarinet), underneath the raging tremolo in the violins and timpani. As the orchestra takes over the love duet between Stellio and Albina [v. s. p. 50/1/2], the music is transformed into a turbulent outpouring of themes which in the opera continue to be associated with *anxiety* (n. 8), *danger* (n. 7) and *fear* (n. 2) [see **thematic guide on p. 123-4**].⁷²

As stated in his letter, what Smareglia required from Benco was to expand this scene by making it altogether more effective. In his opinion, Falena’s sudden eruption from the forest passed too soon, and was not sufficient to leave a strong impression: it all needed to be evoked more persuasively. It seems that the kind of contrast he needed involved the transition from the fear and terror caused by Falena to something which would appear triumphant at the same time. The way Smareglia imagined this extension of the scene was by adding more “insinuating, voluptuous, sensual” verses for Falena: following her initial, violent entrance, in this manner Falena would surprise further, unveiling the other, warmer side of her character.⁷³

The transformation of this scene was captured in the music most effectively; the example is provided in **Appendix D, Example D. 1**. The energetic musical expression given to Falena’s initial appearance was gradually dissolved: there is a transitional four-bar orchestral section, which, with delicately spaced modulations, leads the texture from D major to the brighter, E major, tranquillising the atmosphere and establishing a poetic and serene kind of mood. It can be said that all the attention is concentrated on this fresh glow infused in Falena’s expression. Set in *Adagio*, we see Falena in a new light as her arioso (“Alla mia voce il sonno”) is given an

⁷¹ Sansone’s comment refers to all three Smareglia and Benco’s operas; see Sansone, “Antonio Smareglia”, pp. 417.

⁷² The analysis of the opera reveals numerous leitmotifs. The present list (see pp. 123-124 of this chapter) isolates the most significant ones; the motifs are numbered according to the order of appearance. The numbers in square brackets are being used for easier reference. The labels of these motifs have been chosen by the author; for the most part, their names (or their main ideas) correspond to those of Hugo Tomicich, in his short guide to the opera. Cf. Hugo Tomicich 1904, *Die Falene: Legende von Silvio Benco, Musik von Antonio Smareglia*, Berlin. See also discussion on p. 122 of this chapter.

⁷³ Smareglia discussed this scene in his letter, see Appendix B, letter B. C. 1255.

immediate placid intonation; we can isolate the sequence of vocal gestures, consisting of a two-bar phrase, gradually ascending to a higher musical range. The diatonic course of her melody is only apparent: there are chromatic turns of phrase, decorated with numerous anticipations and appoggiaturas, for example, in the first three bars of her melody (v. s. p. 59 bars 6-9).

We can perceive that the composer continues to unfold her melody which, with the involvement of Albina and Stellio, only seems to gain more intensity. Nothing appears to disrupt her expression: we can note through the couple's agitated lines that they are already affected by Falena: their voices fuse with her part, joining in brief but *harmonious*, almost duet-like combinations. The harmonic basis which envelops this texture reinforces its mesmerizing effect by sustaining, during the first five bars, a slow oscillation of the E major and its dominant minor 9th chord. As the pulse of Falena's melodic contour gently accelerates, inducing Stellio to his magic sleep (“A un ala/ che ti sfiora i capelli, ala di sogno”), the harmonic texture begins to shift chromatically. In spite of numerous modulations, the key of E major predominates in this section, and is supported by sustained pedals (on its dominant or tonic). At times the composer enhances the captivating effect by freezing the harmonic basis, above which two chords oscillate in a succession, for example the four-bar fluctuating of d minor and A major above the protracted pedal on E [v. s. p. 60/2/1 to 60/3/1]. The overall effect of Falena's *arioso* is that of an incantation: besides casting a spell on the King, it leaves an impression on the listener; the music foretells the happenings of act II.

The scene ends by Falena returning to her violent tone as she articulates her last prophetic words, which Smareglia called “versi satanici”. The orchestral texture temporarily freezes above the diminished 7th chord, then underlines the fearful atmosphere by emphasising the wildness of the motif of *anxiety* (n. 8). The effect is enhanced further with Albina's desperate cry, spasmodically woven into the texture which follows.⁷⁴ As the orchestra announces the theme of her *cavern* (n. 10), Falena vanishes, leaving the memory of her presence in the orchestra: the texture continuously employs the motif of *danger* (n. 7), and of *Albina's cry* (n. 11, see **thematic guide**)[p. 65/4/2-66/2/1], both which are elaborately used in act II.

⁷⁴ For Albina Smareglia demanded additional verses described as: “versi ... molto spezzati, frasi corte fra le quali trascorrono delle brevi pause”, from the letter B. C. 1270, in Novel, “ ‘Visione musicalissima’ ”, pp. 51-52. The discussion of *Abisso's* vocal writing is provided in Chapter VI.

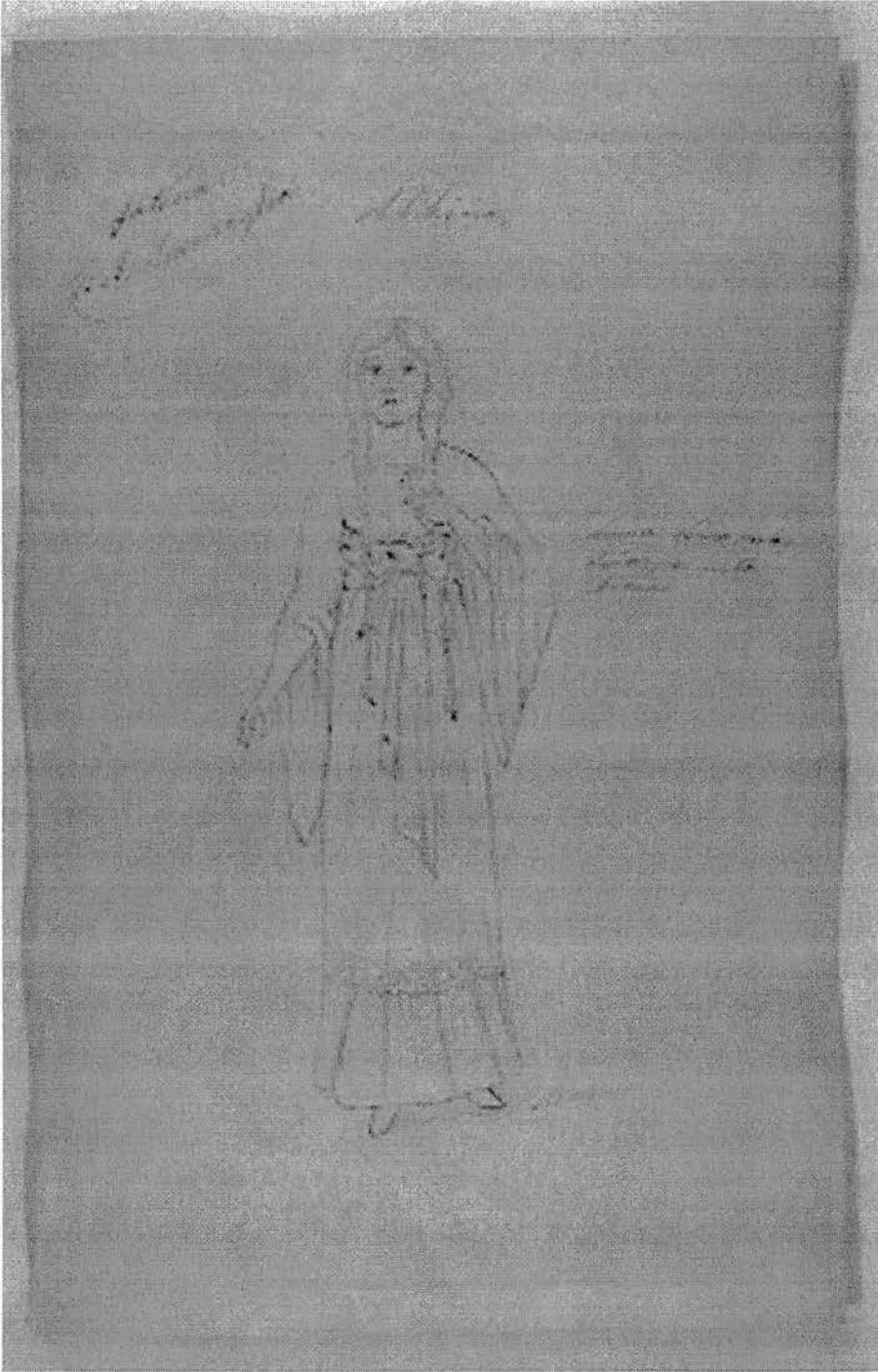


Illustration 9: The image of Albina from the 1899 performance in Trieste. From the Civico Museo Teatrale “Carlo Schmidl”.

ii. “Undramatic oneiric fantasy”

Smareglia’s interventions in the layout of the dramatic structure of the second act, from what appears in his letters, were not extensive as was the case in act I. An example worth mentioning

from a musical point of view is the set of additional lines he needed for Falena’s monologue at the beginning of the act. The composer imagined the scene as more extended: in order to extend it, he asked for the kind of lines which would give a “warm, anxious, ... erotic impulse”. As a result the scene gained a short musical section, an *Allegro* conjuring up the excitement stirred up by Stellio’s arrival: both the orchestra and Falena for the first time employ a musical idea associated with *love* (n. 6) [v. s. p. 90/3/1 to 91/2/1]. The motif is elaborated further as the main material in the texture, which is characterised by changes of tempo and sudden chromatic modulations. Nevertheless, the moment which gave a particular stimulus to the composer’s imagination was the end of act II. The long delirium scene, often referred to as “the lament of the forest”, is a dream-inspired episode that Smareglia envisioned while he had a fever [see **Appendix D, Example D. 2**].⁷⁵ The example will be discussed on p. 121-122.

It could be said that the second act of the opera is the most illuminating example of the way in which Smareglia evokes the eerie atmosphere of the plot and of the irrational world of the two protagonists. From this moment on, the opera begins to unfold as an “undramatic oneiric fantasy”, as in fact, the action takes place while Stellio dreams. It is the part of the plot during which Falena waits in her cave for the King, whom she had previously hypnotised. She seduces him at first erotically, then by inducing him to drink, and by a particularly enticing way of singing. This leads them into sensual pleasures, in the frenzy of which he is persuaded to murder Albina’s father, who comes to rescue him. Both characters move as if intoxicated, by the wine, by each other’s presence and by the nightmarish atmosphere around them. The musical structure of this act is conceived as a single intense scene evolving around the two main characters. The mounting tension of their emotions is realised in a constant alternation of *ariosos*, which are at times more lyrical (when Falena wants to appear kind and attractive), at others more declamatory (when she orders Stellio what to do). Although certain passages resemble arias and duets, they arise imperceptibly from the symphonic texture and sink back into it.

A distinctive feature of this act is the manner in which Smareglia evokes the hallucinatory state into which his characters gradually sink. The following example [see **Example IV A**] displays what can be described as Falena’s ‘hypnotic’ music, which she sings in order to persuade Stellio to drink some wine. Her melody is in contrast to the previous section: set in *Un poco più sostenuto*, she quietly begins to articulate a sleep-inducing phrase. The hypnotising effect is achieved by several means. There is an immutable rhythmic pace suggested in a series of

⁷⁵ This was revealed by Smareglia himself in the previously mentioned article “Come nascono le melodie?”, see Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 305. This scene is discussed as the music example IV D.

repetitive *quinari* lines, divided by short pauses. The orchestration is transparent, employing sustained chords in the woodwinds, above which there is a “twinkling” motif (n. 15) coloured by the high registers of violins *con sordina*. There are additional, rippling arpeggios in the harp. Once the initial mesmeric effect is obtained, Falena’s phrase unfolds into more melodious expression. Although the slow pace and soft dynamic are retained, the composer gradually raises Falena’s voice to a higher register, preserving its trance-like expressivity.⁷⁶

Example IV A: ‘hypnotic music’, v. s. p. 98

98

L.F.
D.F.

Tu non co - no - sci le dol - ci, not - ti, non sai che lau - re pre - gna d'ò -
Nachttrunk dein Mund nicht den küß der Won - ne, wechlich kö - sind in mächtig

do - ri scia - mi na - scon - do - no di de - si - de - ra, che in ti - gni
Stun - de der sü - ße Blü - len - haß den Wald durch - flu - ßet, den dir zum

espress.

brul - la - ro vo - la - no a - mo - ti. Fal ca - rez - ze - vo - le mol - tur - no
Brand - ge - noch Lie - be ge - schenkt hat. Lint die - ser Sc - he - kail willst du, voll

mf

bol - la - mo re - si - sli so - lo? Be - vi, mio si - re!
Ju - gendkraft so leicht ent - sei - gen? Trink aus, mein Kö - nig!

p

Nun sen - ti? pas - sa - no gli a - mo - ria vo - lo! Tra ei - gliò e
Be - den - ke, Lie - bes - glück ver - geht im Fla - ge, es leidet nicht

p

J. K. 1935.

More tension is infused in the scene as Falena becomes impatient and manipulative of her guest: in order to overcome him completely she commands Stellio to drink her ‘magic’ wine. The potion here gains an additional meaning, symbolising Stellio’s inability to resist Falena

⁷⁶ Two of the leitmotifs have been described as “twinkling” (because of their particular melodic shape) for easier references in the analysis. Smareglia returned to the ‘hypnotic’ music further on in the act, in the moment when Falena persuades Stellio to proving his love for her by killing the old Uberto, see v. s. p. 106/6/4 – 107/3/3.

and thus reinforcing their fated embrace. The dramatic significance of the moment, as well as the danger hidden in the potion (announcing the effect it will have on Stello) is emphasised in music [see **Example IV B**, v. s. p. 101/2/1 – 103/1/3; see also **thematic guide**]. The orchestra condenses several of the most significant leitmotifs of the opera, reminding us of the *tragedy* (n. 1)[in bar 5], of Falena’s *power* (n. 5) [in bar 3] and of general *anxiety* (n. 8) [in bar 4]:

Example IV B: v. s. p. 101-103

101

S. so - - - - - no, se v'ob - be-di - - sco o -
See - - - - - le, die wil - len - los euch ge -

La Falena. Die Falene. (dominando) (mit Bestimmtheit)
Vuo - ta, vuo-la il ca - li-ce, l'a - ni-ma s'o -
Trin - ke, schließ die Won - ne ein! Ah! dein Ir - des -

S. gnor? Kercht.
p

L.F. D.F. le - vi fi-no al fol-le ar-do - re. Be-vil Be-vil
Sin - nen Nicht wie Spreu im Win - de. Trin-ke! Trin-ke!
cresc.

L.F. D.F. ritard. (Stello beve, indi contempla la Falena che lo guarda voluttosamente.)
(Stello trinkt; die Falena sieht ihn mit verlangenden Blicken.)
Be - vil
Trin - ke! Più sostenuto. (♩. 69)
ritard. p

I.E. 1325 7

102 Allegro moderato. (♩ = 118)

Stellio.

Dav-ver sei bel-la! Su-pre-ma-men-ter! E dim-mi, non-hai
Für-wahr, schön bist du, un-sag-bar herr-lich! Doch sag mir, wel-chen

p espress.

La Falena. Die Falene.

Ba-cia e non par-lar. (esaltato) (begeistert)
Schwei-ge und küs-se mich!

S. no-me ond'io ti chia-mi? So non fan-ciul-lo
Na-men trägt dei-ne Schön-heit? Süß muß dein Na-me

L.F. D.F. Mi chia-me-ra-i Re-
Nun daru: so heiß' mich „Re-

S. slo-li-do che ha bi-so-gno d'un no-me.
kün-gen aus dem Munde der Lie-be.

L.F. D.F. da-na.
da-na. (mentre lo si avvicina) (sich ihr nähernd)

S. Re-da-na! Stra-na mu-si-ca del no-me tu-ol!
Re-da-na! Welch ein Wohl-klangtönt aus die-ser Na-men!

p

J. E. 1325.

103

La Falena. Die Falene.

Dim - me - lo an - oor!
Sag' noch ein - mal.

do - ro!
lieb' dich!

Ta - do - ro e nel pet - to houn - to di
Ich lieb' dich, der Auf - rath - im Her - zen ver -

poco a poco

fiam - me, e tut - te stri - do - no: T'a - do - ro, e mi - a ti
kün - det mit lau - tem Ju - bel - ruf: Ich lieb' dich und mein sollst du

dim.

vam - pan le fiam - me ne la vo - ce e mi ri - pe - to - no il
Glut - hauch ent - rümt heiß - dei - nen Wor - ten: es bring' der Wän - ne laut als

vo - glio.
wer - den.

p

J. E. 1325.

The dramatic moment of Stellio's ‘metamorphosis’ is instantly captured in music [from v. s. p. 102]. The texture swiftly changes its expression by moving its tonality from F minor to F sharp major, and transforming its movement, making a direct impact on the listener [on v. s. p. 101/3/4 – 101/4/1]. The mounting tension and the sensual excitement of the two protagonists is conjured up in the arioso in which one emotional state merges into another. There is a succession of brief passages, alternating almost impatiently. Organised through a sequence of richly orchestrated modulations, the flow of music involves the most distant tonalities: the passages from F sharp major – D major – B flat major to G flat major produces a colouristic effect, suggesting the change of mood, alluding partially to the polarities of the real and the bewitched worlds. An example of these steps of tonality can be seen as with the shift from

Bflat to Gflat major, the point where the King, having heard Falena’s ‘proper’ name, admits the effect it has on him: “Redana! Strana musica del nome tuo”, v. s. p. 102/4/1-3. We notice Stellio’s phrase (“Davver sei bella”) gaining the part from what was Falena’s sensuous melody heard earlier on in the scene (“Te, te voglio”) [cf. v. s. p. 102/1/1-3 with **Example I. 3. E** in Chapter I, p. 15], then gradually escalating in its course, becoming more restless, agitated and carried away by Falena’s presence.

The drama of the rest of the act continues to evolve in this perpetual alteration of *ariosos*, carrying this hallucinatory state of the couple further, with a climax in view as the second act comes to its end.⁷⁷ The ecstatic mood is given a variety of different expressions: for example, Falena’s meditative tone corresponds to *Andantino* (“Ed ecco fuor dal mare”) [v. s. p. 130/1/1 – 3/2], and is joined by Stellio (“Confusi i tuoi capelli ai miei”) [v. s. p. 130/3/2 – 131/3/1] whose expression is accompanied with the orchestra led into an extremely high register, capturing the disorder of his senses.

Smareglia’s concentration on evoking this atmosphere reaches its culmination in the long ‘delirium’ scene at the end of act II [see **Appendix D, Example D. 2**, v. s. p. 134-139]. The additional elements of symbolism and imagery pertaining to this part of the plot (such as the permanent blood stains on Stellio’s hands and his ‘hearing’ of Albina’s voice) reinforce the overall dramatic effect, stimulating Smareglia further in creating the most compelling musical expression. The composer embedded it in a completely new orchestral texture in which we can discern two main sections. At first, there is an eighteen-bar harmonic *stasis* maintained in the suspended chord in the woodwinds (the secondary ninth on D sharp, as the submediant of F sharp major) and supported further by harp arpeggios. Above this harmony we hear the orchestra lingering in the upper registers; there is a continuous interweaving of almost lifeless motifs in the violins (n. 12), in the horns (n. 13), with the “twinkling” phrase (n. 14) which, contrary to the ‘hypnotic music’, now moves faster and involves the oboe. Although there are continuous changes of metre (between 9/8 and 3/4), the repetitive syncopated rhythm above the protracted pedal seems to restrain the melody from advancing its course, reflecting Stellio imprisoned with the torment of his conscience. His agony is carried further as the tempo slows down to *Andante sostenuto*, with a sinuous theme in the low register of strings (n. 15) which chromatically leads the texture to C sharp minor. From this moment on the musical language continuously underlines the cry of Stellio’s conscience. There is a sustained pedal on C sharp above which we hear Albina’s cry, now symbolising the “the lament of forest”, the theme

⁷⁷ The exception is the appearance of Uberto, a brief episode during which Stellio kills the old man, which Smareglia considered to be both dramatically and musically the weakest and most defective part of the act. Cf. letter B.C. 1276, in Novel, “‘Visione musicalissima’”.

whose associations we first perceived at the end of act I (see theme n. 11).⁷⁸ Its development gradually permeates the whole musical texture, condensing the orchestra into an always harmonically richer fabric, above which the vocal parts fluctuate in extremely high registers. In this way Smareglia unveils the irrational, hallucinatory world occupied by the two protagonists.

Since the examples discussed in the analysis made references to numerous recurring themes of the opera, it seems sensible to briefly reflect on the main musical ideas in *Falena* [see **thematic guide** on p. 123-4]. The investigation of the opera’s structure reveals that the composer employed a wealth of musical themes into its texture. The examples discussed provide only a sample of Smareglia’s usage of leitmotifs; it can be said that there are some thirty frequently recurring themes in *Falena* which permeate the musical texture.⁷⁹ Smareglia employs these themes in the ‘Wagnerian’ manner; they are all used as a generating force for the ongoing musical development, and at the same time are endowed with dramatic significance. A curious feature of these motifs is that most of them, similarly to Wagner’s later operas (as in *Tristan und Isolde* for example) are associated with ‘ideas’ rather than characters: out of the nine leitmotifs to which we are introduced in the prelude which opens the opera, only one theme directly refers to a character – to Falena’s ‘power’ (or ‘tempting’) (n. 5). The remaining eight symbolise *tragedy* (n. 1), *fear* (n. 2), the *spell* (n. 3), *restlessness* (n. 4), *love* (n. 6), *danger* (n. 7), *anxiety* (n. 8) and *threat* (n. 9). What remains most in the mind when looking at the thematic network, is the density with which the themes are woven into the score and Smareglia’s skill in reinforcing the drama with them; for example the orchestra often tells us more than the action itself (condensing three leitmotifs in the moment when Falena orders Stellio to drink, cf. Example IV B), or the musical foretelling of the event which will follow, such as the motif of ‘tragedy’ (n. 1), appearing several times ‘turned’ when Falena first mentions her powers [see v. s. p. 51/3/2 and 52/3/1]. Once she uses her power the motif finally appears in its original form [see. v. s. p. 57/4/5 – 57/1/3].⁸⁰

⁷⁸ This part of act II is sometimes performed as an independent musical piece.

⁷⁹ This estimate is tentative. The present list of the leading themes includes only the most relevant of them. The leitmotif names are by the author and only in some cases correspond to those given by Hugo Tomicich; cf. this index with Tomicich 1904, *Die Falene. Legende von Silvio Benco. Musik von Antonio Smareglia*, revised ed. Berlin: Verlag von Alfred Katz.

⁸⁰ Although it is correct that Smareglia, generally, preferred to use the musical themes (at least some of them) in their original form, there are numerous examples of the composer transforming the leitmotifs, the fact which was not considered by Vito Levi; cf. his *Oceana di Antonio Smareglia: piccola guida verso l'opera*, p. 25. See also discussion in Chapter I.

LA FALENA – THEMATIC GUIDE

[1] Tragedy



[2] Fear



[3] Spell



[4] Restlessness



[5] Power



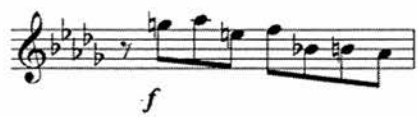
[6] Love



[7] Danger



[8] Anxiety



[9] Threat



[10] Cavern



[11] Albina’s cry



[12]

[13]



[14]

“Twinkling” motifs:

[15]

[16]



IV. 6 Conclusion

... [I]n essa [*Falena*] il musicista, liberato dei dialoghi più o meno realistici che facevano ingombro al suo naturale lirismo e magari forzavano in lui una vena comica o folkloristica che non era nel suo carattere, acquistava una libertà d'espressione, una possibilità di mantenere largo e puro il disegno della musica, un vigore della sprigionata fantasia, che possono considerarsi qualità essenziali del nuovo periodo che s'iniziava dell' arte sua. [Benco, *Ricordi*, 67]

[...In it [*Falena*], the musician, free from the more or less realistic dialogues which hindered his innate lyricism, and perhaps forced him into a comic or folkloristic vein which was not in his nature, gained a freedom of expression, a possibility of sustaining the musical design in a broad and pure manner, the vigour of an imagination set free. These features can be considered as the essential qualities of the new period which his art was initiating.]

The first impression which one gets when investigating Smareglia's *Falena* is of how unusual it is and different from those operas that formed the repertory at the time in Italy. By virtue of all its elements of the undramatic, its profusion of music, and Benco's decadent imagination in creating the text, the opera seems to differ from the then predominant *verismo* operas, and to head in the direction of what could be described as a 'poetic kind of theatre'. This aspect will be further discussed in the examples from the other two Smareglia – Benco operas. The second significant particularity of the opera is the manner and the effectiveness with which the music and text are fused. It seems that Smareglia conveyed the poetic essence of the drama, responding primarily to those elements of the plot which Benco himself, at times with the composer's help, developed most successfully. *Falena*'s initial appearance for example, or the entire act II are the kind of scenes which both in the libretto and in the music are the most powerfully expressed. On the other hand, the narrative of the sailor Morio (start of act III) or even the murder of Albina's father, Uberto (half way through act II) remain insufficiently interesting both in the story and in Smareglia's music. The explanation could be summed up in the words of Waterhouse:

Smareglia's music is always refined, impressively spacious, and often truly elevated, though not altogether evenly inspired; but it suffers from a certain uniformity of tone, a lack of dramatic contrasts, and an inability to differentiate characters [J. C. Waterhouse, *The Emergence of Italian Modern Music*, pp. 57-8]

What transpires from *Falena* are the devices which, as will be discussed in the following chapters, typify all three of Smareglia's operas set to texts by Benco.



Illustration 10: Silvio Benco and Antonio Smareglia around 1898

CHAPTER V

OCEANA – TONE POETRY

Oceana. Commedia fantastica in 3 acts.

Milan, Teatro alla Scala, 22 January 1903.

È annunciata per questa sera la seconda rappresentazione della nuovissima opera di Antonio Smareglia, *Oceana* – la quale verrà certamente a ristabilire – noi speriamo – l’equilibrio fra gli apprezzamenti disparati del pubblico e della critica, di fronte alla premiere. Ad ogni modo – e ciò appare dagli articoli largamente analitici di molti colleghi – l’*Oceana* è occasione di diventare non solo il caso speciale, ma tutta una tesi. E sarà bene la si discuta. [in *Il Tempo*, 24 January, 1903]

[The second performance of the latest opera of Antonio Smareglia, *Oceana*, is announced for tonight. It will certainly manage to re-establish, we hope, the balance between the disparate opinions among the audience and the critics with regard to its premiere. In any case, as it appears from the largely analytical articles by numerous colleagues, *Oceana* has a chance to become not only a special case, but material for a whole dissertation. And so, it should be discussed.]

V. 1 Introduction

Among the operas written in Italy in the first decade of the twentieth century, Benco’s and Smareglia’s *Oceana* stands out for its originality and style. It is the only “fantastic comedy”, and was conceived by the writer and the composer in a style that had become recognised as “*teatro di poesia*” (poetic theatre).¹ This expression did not, however, come from the composer himself, or from the librettist. It has been used by recent critics who want to capture the character of *Oceana*, and find “poetic theatre” to be the most suitable to describe the opera. Another suitable description would be “allusive, purely musical theatre” (Sansone), and with regard to all the three Benco and Smareglia operas, “undramatic oneiric fantasies” (Sansone).

Benco’s desire to create a libretto with particular ‘gaps’ for music came at the time when the nature of the task of writing libretti was undergoing very fundamental changes. The

¹ Section V. 3. iii. is dedicated to “*teatro di poesia*”; see also Chapter I. 2.

susceptibility of Italian literature at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to foreign influences (to the French Symbolists and the writers of Decadence) was reflected in a new type of collaboration between the writer and the composer, such as the one between D'Annunzio and Franchetti (or Mascagni), or in the Benco - Smareglia works. The change was obvious even in the works of Puccini who, after his achievement prior to and with *Madama Butterfly* (Milan 1904) felt that he needed to move away from realistic conventions: he started by looking to the works of Oscar Wilde and Pierre Louÿs. As Tedeschi commented, Puccini's renewal was never radical in the end, as he was in disagreement with the "decadent librettists" and gave up on them (Tedeschi 1988: 51).

Benco's particular effort to deepen the musical implications in the text so as to stimulate Smareglia's imagination, coincided with the composer's unfortunate physical condition (the loss of sight). Still, it is difficult to believe that his libretti would have been different even if Smareglia had kept his sight. In the late 19th and early 20th century, composers were asking the librettist, who was often also a writer with an independent literary reputation as a poet, to determine the *atmosphere* of the opera. An example is Mascagni's *Iris* (Rome 1898), for which the composer commissioned the libretto from Illica, asking for a "a tragedy that could be treated realistically but in which the setting could colour the music".² The outcome was a number of purely orchestral sections and a very static plot. In the early twentieth century, Illica, however, complained about the changes which threatened libretto writing, "corrupting the simplicity and naturalness of language..." (Carner 1992: 86). The major figure he blamed, not surprisingly, was the most eminent and clamorous representative of Italian decadence, Gabriele D'Annunzio.

Taking a lead from a variety of existing documentation on *Oceana*, the aim of this Chapter is to select those significant features from this opera which gave it a distinguished position in the repertory in Italian theatres in the early twentieth century. A choice has deliberately been made so that the themes which will be discussed, such as the sources of the libretto, or the idea of "poetic theatre", complement the material in the rest of the thesis. Furthermore, these themes seem, in my judgement, the most characteristic for this opera.

The following passages describe the genesis of the libretto, and investigate the features which stimulated the composer's imagination. Although Smareglia had read *Oceana* in 1898, he went on to set it to music when he was completely blind, having the verses read to him, and dictating

² Michele Girardi 1992, "Iris", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. by Stanley Sadie, vol. 2, pp. 824-825.

the music. The intention of the last section is to analyse the peculiarities of *Oceana*'s music: its evocation of poetic atmosphere, its latent dramaturgy and the creative use of leitmotifs.

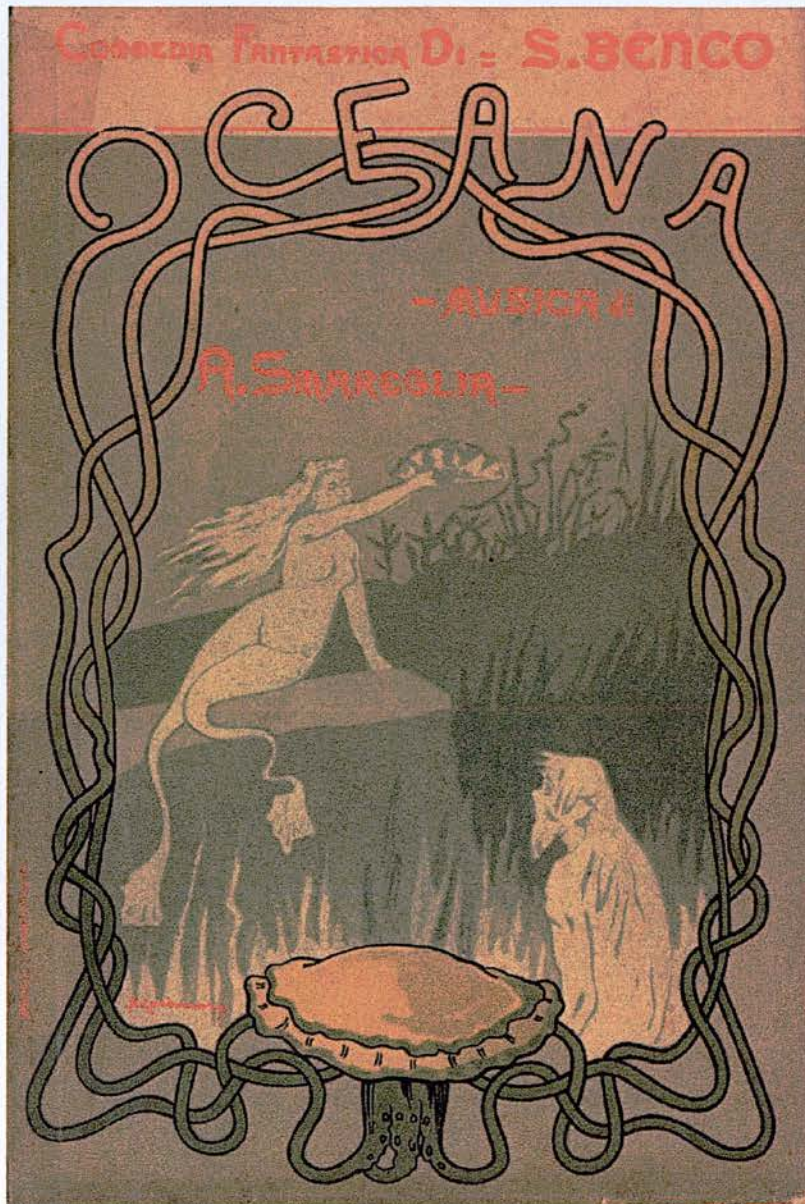


Illustration 11: *Oceana*, the cover page of the libretto on the occasion of the opera's premiere in 1903.

V. 2 Synopsis

Characters:

Vadar - one of the chiefs of the Noat tribe

Hareb - his brother

Nersa - young semi-divine girl

Peasants of the Noat tribe

Init - the God of the sea

Uls - genius of the sea

Ers - another genius of the sea

Tritons, sirens, undines, spirits of water

The plot takes place in Syria in the time of the patriarchs³

Act I: On Vadar's plantation

The women from the Noat tribe are tired from a hard day's work. One of them, the young and pretty Nersa, is singing happily, which irritates the others. They have been teasing her about a dream she has had: that one day she would marry a divine creature. She has also attracted the attention of the old widower Vadar, the rich owner of their land, who has fallen in love with her. Out of jealousy, a fight breaks out among the girls. It is stopped by the sudden appearance of Ers, genius of the sea. He knows about Nersa's longings, and persuades her to follow him into the promised fairy land where the God of the sea, Init, is waiting to meet her. She accepts his suggestion; however, their conversation is overheard by Vadar's younger brother Hareb who has been walking nearby. He approaches them very quietly, interrupting their escape. A brief argument follows between Ers and Hareb, which reveals Hareb's dishonest and foolish nature. After a few minutes, he lets them go.

It is evening time. Vadar, in an attempt to make his brother tell him what has been happening, offers him a hundred sheep. At this point Hareb reveals that Nersa has run away. Vadar is very distressed and orders all the peasants to go and search for her. Soon, Nersa is found and brought back by old Uls, another sea genius, and a friend of Ers. All the people demand Nersa's punishment, which, according to traditional law, applies to anyone who runs away from the tribe. Vadar, being in love, makes an exception. A dispute arises and is finally resolved by

³ Benco's decision to set the story in the time of the patriarchs is curious. From the many existing definitions in dictionaries of the word "patriarch", Benco must have been attracted by the those which mean "an oldest inhabitant", "a venerable old man" or "a father or founder". His choice may be explained by his desire to set the story in the most vague and indefinite way possible.

Uls's proposal that Nersa should be abandoned on a distant beach for three days and three nights. There, she can meditate on her guilt. After this period of solitude, Vadar will take her home. Uls escorts her to the chosen spot by the sea. Their departure is followed by malicious comments among the girls.

Act II: Nightfall on the seashore

While Nersa is asleep under the moonlight, Ers and Uls quarrel about who is going to win the precious pearl, the prize that has been promised by Init to the one that finds his future bride for him. Uls starts to sing a lullaby to Nersa, and soon falls asleep himself. The sea starts to undulate. It is the sea God, Init, who arrives, accompanied by four tritons playing on seashells. Init requests to see his future bride, and is fascinated by her beauty. He wakes her up and renames her *Oceana*, promising her marriage and eternal love, and the title of Goddess of the Sea. The two of them are enchanted by each other. While Uls is still asleep, Ers profits from the situation, deluding Init into thinking that it was he who found Nersa and that he deserves the precious pearl. Init commands undines to dance: one of them shall create the priceless pearl.

From a distance, Vadar's ship is seen approaching. Vadar could not live any longer without Nersa, and with his brother Hareb, is searching for her. All of the sea creatures are alarmed, as they must stay invisible to the humans. Nersa realises that she must return to Vadar, who has given her a home when she was orphaned. Init protests and asks Ers for a way to stop the humans taking away his *Oceana*. Ers proposes that the sirens should sing a song which will stop the wind and disturb the sailors. While Init rushes to hide himself, the chorus of sirens try to overturn Vadar's ship. However, Nersa asks Uls to save Vadar. She is moved by Vadar's devotion and decides to return to the village and marry him. However, the sirens' melody causes Hareb to go mad. As Uls wants to revenge himself on Ers for getting the precious pearl by trickery, he helps Nersa in saving Vadar's boat. While she sings a farewell to the sea, Ers is certain that she will soon return to their sea world.

Act III: At Vadar's palace

Vadar and Nersa's wedding celebration is in preparation. However, their faces are sad. Nersa is melancholy, and thinks of her beloved Init. She is interrupted by the sudden appearance of Ers. He announces a surprise to her: Init is with him. Nersa and Init confess and declare their eternal love. Their embrace is seen by Vadar. Touched by their strong love, he realises that he has lost Nersa. In despair he accepts Uls' advice: since Init is the God of the sea, he can make any wish

come true. Vadar should change place's with Hareb and become insane himself. This way he will forget his love. The god Init makes his wish come true. Vadar then becomes a simple wanderer, while Hareb inherits his brother's fortune. They all celebrate Init and Nersa's wedding.

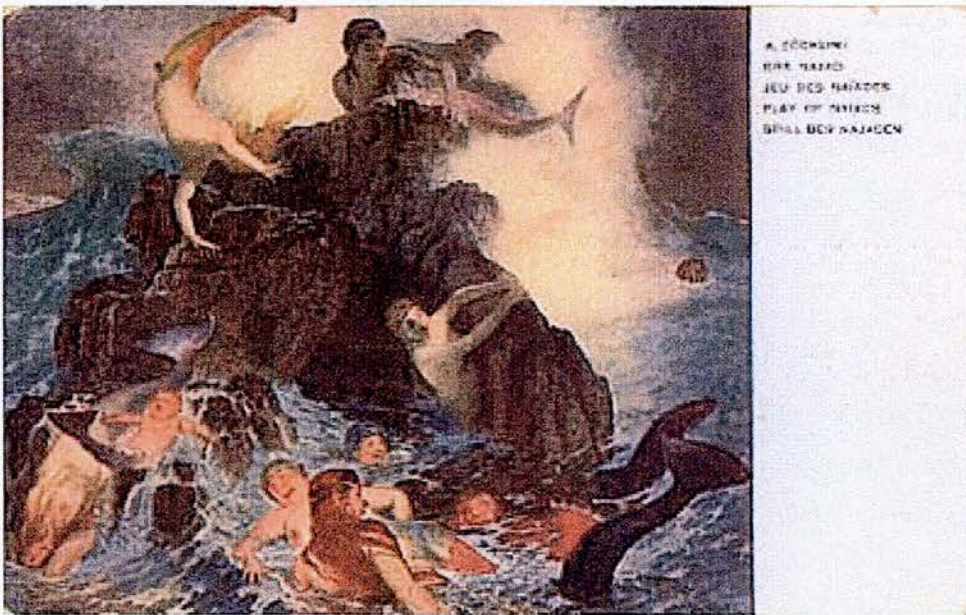


Illustration 12: *Arnold Böcklin, The Naiads at Play, 1886.*

V. 3 Libretto

i. Sources

The genesis of *Oceana*'s libretto is one of the most curious aspects of the opera, since its plot is not based on a pre-existing play or real historical event, as was most often the case. In creating it, as well as in making his first libretto *La Falena*, Benco's imagination was completely animated by the elements of the fantastic. In the case of *Oceana*, at the back of his mind were the characters from Shakespeare's plays (*The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Goethe's verses from *Iphigenie auf Tauris*: "Es fürchte die Götter - Das Menschengeschlecht", and in particular, a painting: *Im Spiel der Wellen* [In the play of the waves, 1885? Munich, Neue Pinakothek].⁴ The sea-picture by Arnold Böcklin provided the atmosphere and the appearance of the characters who would come to life in Benco's "fantastic comedy" (*commedia fantastica*). In fact, the resemblance to the images of Böcklin's painting can be seen in several of the stage designs as well as on the cover page of the early edition of *Oceana*'s libretto [see **Illustration 11**].⁵

At the turn of the century, literature and visual arts came so close to music that, in some cases, as with D'Annunzio, the poet felt deep regrets about not being able to compose, because he needed music for his plays (Tedeschi 1988: 9). In return, the composers desired more from a literary stimulus; an example can be found in Debussy's reflection on what the ideal librettist would be like: "One who only states half of what is to be said, and allows me to graft my dream on to his. One who conceives his characters as out of place and out of time, and who does not force on me a 'big scene'. One who, here and there, will allow me the freedom to have a little more art than he - to finish off his work."⁶

⁴ A reproduction of this painting can be found in Leon Botstein 1990-1, "Brahms and 19th Century Painting", in *19th Century Music* 14/2, p. 164.

⁵ See Silvio Benco 1901, *Oceana, commedia fantastica*, Venice: Officine Grafiche L. Ferrari. We learn from a letter of Benco, written in 1902, that the stage designs and the cover page for the first edition of *Oceana*'s libretto were drawn by Achille Tamburlini, the Italian painter and sculptor, who was a friend of Smareglia, and in whose house the composer was a guest while staying in Venice (see Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 13n and p. 27). However, there are some doubts whether the author of the final stage designs was Tamburlini, since the cover page of the first edition of the libretto [see the Illustration n. 11 on p. 129] bears the signature of R. Carbonara, while the stage designs mentioned in the study by Perpich, *Il teatro musicale*, p. 113 and by Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, were signed as A. Terzi and Tenzi, respectively. On the basis of these facts we cannot be certain what Tamburlini's illustrations looked like. For more on Tamburlini see Personalia, Appendix A. Some of the stage designs are provided later on in this chapter.

⁶ Quoted in Richard Langham Smith's article on "Claude Debussy" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 1, p. 1098.

It is not certain whether Benco had read *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1892), or had heard the performance of Debussy's opera (Paris 1902). Nevertheless, behind this symbolist play by Maurice Maeterlinck, there is a similar example of the influence of visual art on the writer, and on his conception of the text. As was just mentioned, it was a text which Debussy would consider as ideal for musical setting. Besides being influenced in his writing by Pre-Raphaelites, by Shakespeare and by Poe, we learn that Maeterlinck was inspired by painting: "the haunting figures of Burne-Jones's pallid damsels, their dilated eyes on the verge of tears, distilling the world's sorrow, were clearly implicated in the genesis of *Mélisande*, and in *Pelléas*, as in many images of Burne-Jones, these frail figures exist in an atmosphere where violence is never far away" (Langham Smith 1989: 4).⁷

In his chapter on the genesis of Maeterlinck's play, Richard Langham Smith supports his opinion by quoting Maeterlinck's contemporary, Iwan Gilkin: "[Maeterlinck's] art does not in any way imitate the art of Burne-Jones, but responds to it and completes it. Or rather, there is a kind of exchange between these two artists. If Burne-Jones furnished Maeterlinck with the outward appearance of his characters and the visible atmosphere which envelops them, Maeterlinck has interrogated these wonderful figures, unveiled their souls, fathomed their mystery. He has formulated their magic and musical language, expressed in words all the poetic passions which trouble their hearts, and the lofty and melancholy thoughts which are reflected in their beautiful faces."⁸

There exists "a kind of exchange" of a similar nature between the art works of Benco and Böcklin. It is not clear, even in Benco's own writings, on which occasion he had seen Böcklin's paintings, but the impression of the painter on Benco was mentioned by Smareglia himself in the interview prior to *Oceana*'s premiere. Benco also revealed the links: "For me, *Oceana* arose from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, from Böcklin's painting and from the admirable chorus "Es fürchte die Götter - das Menschengeschlecht", from Goethe's play *Iphigenie [auf Tauris]*."⁹ Benco had written, in a nonchalant letter to the editor of the Triestine newspaper *Il*

⁷ Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833-1898) was an English painter and decorative artist who came under the influence of a group of artists, poets and critics known as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He was particularly impressed by medieval legends, Classical mythology and Italian Primitive painters, and produced art which radiated dreamy atmospheres (in Margaret Drabble ed. 1985, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 5th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 148).

⁸ Quoted in Richard Langham Smith and Rogers Nichols 1989, *Claude Debussy: Pelléas et Mélisande*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 5.

⁹ "Per me *Oceana* è nata dal Sogno d'una notte di mezza estate, dalla pittura di Böcklin, dal mirabile coro dell'*Ifigenia* di Goethe: 'Es fürchte die Götter - Das Menschengeschlecht (Pavanti gli Dei - il genere umano)' ", Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 82.

Nuovo Tergesteo, that, in the second act of *Oceana*, “there is a nocturnal scene on the seashore: it is a grotesque fight between the two sea geniuses *in the style of Böcklin*...”¹⁰

As far as the second act of *Oceana* is concerned, Benco’s inspiration extended far beyond one particular Böcklin painting. The whole set of characters in this opera, their mythological names (Triton, Nereid, Nymph, Naiad) as well as their appearances, were drawn from several pictures of Böcklin, all belonging to the sea world. More on this aspect will be discussed later in this chapter. At this point, it seems sensible to find out why Benco was attracted by the art of Böcklin.

Biographical sources on Arnold Böcklin (1827 – 1901) tell us that he was a Swiss idealist painter “noted for his mysticism, symbolism and generally poetic approach.”¹¹ He was known for spending much of his time observing nature in all her moods, and yet he never painted directly from it: he peopled nature with creatures of his own imagining. That is why he met with opposition from critics and why the appreciation of his art came gradually and was established only in the mid 1880s. His paintings are pure creations of his own fancy, they are inhabited by nymphs, satyrs or “wonderful imaginary creatures in which he gave symbolical shape to the spirit of nature.”¹² We learn that his work, particularly after 1870, has been regarded as “either a precursor to or, ‘Symbolist’”,¹³ and has fascinated and greatly affected the twentieth century surrealists, like Giorgio de Chirico and Salvador Dali (Andree 1971: 8).

Böcklin was of the artists who were “...either associated with or often compared to Johannes Brahms” (Botstein 1990: 156). In his article “Brahms and nineteenth-century painting”, Botstein looks into Böcklin’s themes and his expression, revealing that, for Böcklin, “the object of painting was ‘to touch the eye, without having to explain or describe the effect with words’; to evoke a ‘felt impression’, like instrumental music, without having to ‘render anything explicit’.”¹⁴ In Böcklin’s paintings, “Nature is used as a force reciprocal to the figures The use of light and color is neither decorative nor realistic, but suggestive of an inner attitude” (ibid.: 163-4). What had appealed most to Brahms in Böcklin’s art was “the transformation of nature through painterly vision, ... and the consistent depiction of dynamic sentiment” (ibid.). Böcklin’s pictures, such as the one entitled *Island of the Dead* (1880; Basle, Kunstmuseum), or

¹⁰ “...Nel secondo atto...havvi una scena notturna alla riva del mare: una lotta grottesca fra due genii marini sullo stile di Böcklin...”. The letter (written around 1901-1902) is included in the published collection (Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, pp. 28-29), while the original is kept in the Civico Museo Teatrale “C. Schmidl” in Trieste.

¹¹ Bernard S. Myers, ed. 1956, *Encyclopedia of Painting: Painters and Painting of the World from Prehistoric Times to the Present*. London: Hutchinson, pp. 43-44.

¹² George C. Williamson, ed. 1930, *Bryan’s Dictionary of Painters and Engravers*, vol. 1. London: G. Bell and Sons, pp. 152-153.

¹³ J. Vinston, ed. 1990, *International Dictionary of Art and Artists*. Chicago: St. James Press, pp. 84-86.

¹⁴ Quoted from Botstein, “Brahms and 19th Century Painting”, p. 163.

Triton and Nereid (1873-74; Munich, Schackgalerie), suggest scenes which are on the frontiers between reality and imagination. From the evidence of Benco's writings, and the subjects to which he was attracted, it seems that Benco was fascinated, similarly to Brahms, with the "bizarre imaginary worlds" (Clegg 1996: 206) of Böcklin's paintings.

It appears that the "imaginary world" from Böcklin's paintings, and the power of nature embodied in them were what Benco recognised in Goethe's poem. As was mentioned earlier, while writing *Oceana*, he also had in mind Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, the verses: "Es fürchte die Götter - Das Menschengeschlecht!" (In fear of the Gods shall ye dwell, sons of men!). The two verses in particular belong to the chorus *Gesang der Parzen* (*Song of the fates*) from Goethe's play, and become more significant if we notice that Benco intended to quote them on the front page of *Oceana's* libretto.¹⁵ Although it remains uncertain why the quotation was never included in existing editions of the libretto, it is clear that the theme of the verses directly relates to the ending of the plot, which Benco possibly wanted to foreshadow. The whole strophe (*In fear of the Gods shall ye dwell, sons of men! Sole empire they hold in their hands everlasting and wield at their pleasure the lightnings of fate*) epitomized the "philosophical idea of the comedy", and communicated Benco's explanation of the opera's finale: it is the Gods who control the fate over the humans.¹⁶ Even though the old Vadar was the most positive, goodhearted character throughout the story, his destiny was determined by the God of the sea.

Another source of inspiration for *Oceana* was the poetry of William Shakespeare, who was Benco's favourite writer. It is known that Benco even went on to study English in order to be able to read his plays.¹⁷ The two plays Benco was particularly interested in at the time of writing *Oceana* were *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1595) and *The Tempest* (1611). Since he wanted to create "*teatro fantastico*", he concentrated on the supernatural elements of the plays, and in the music inherent in the poetry.

As was the case with Böcklin's paintings, Benco was attracted to the unusual features in Shakespeare's plays, including the blending of the human and magical world on stage. The devices in *Oceana*, such as presence of the spirits in nature and their interactions with humans, provide a parallel to the combination of the humans and spirits found in Shakespeare's comedy

¹⁵ See Benco's unpublished letter to the critic Boccardi, p. 137, footnote 10.

¹⁶ This chorus was set to music by Brahms in 1882. *Gesang der Parzen*, for orchestra and six-part chorus, op. 89. See Jan Swafford 1998, *Johannes Brahms: A Biography*, New York: A. Knopf, pp. 476 – 478. The translation of the verses used in this study derives from the vocal score of Brahms's composition (the text translated by Natalie Macfarren), published in Berlin 1883, by N. Simrock. In a letter written to Smareglia Benco revealed his ideas on the layout of *Oceana*, mentioning how the ending of the story could be summarised in Goethe's verses; the letter has been partially quoted in Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, p. 55.

¹⁷ From Benco's own autobiographical article, published in *La Voce Libera*, 9 March 1949.

A Midsummer Night's Dream. The fairy-world which Shakespeare set in the woods in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is placed in the sea in the case of *Oceana*. Among a number of details which Benco used in *Oceana*, the most relevant is the element of comedy. The two sea geniuses in *Oceana*, Ers and Uls, who are obedient to their master's commands, have something in common with Shakespeare's Puck: they are mischievously amusing, they operate in both worlds, and have in many respects the role of a Cupid.¹⁸ Nevertheless, their characters are far less defined than Robin's, and are mainly a source for the energetic and grotesque elements in the drama.

Although Benco mentioned Böcklin's painting when describing parts of act II of *Oceana* (such as the quarrel between the two sea geniuses) there are certain details about Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which must be mentioned. For example, its poetic language is described as "no less elusive than the island and its music".¹⁹ The play is seen as "more extreme than anything in Shakespeare's previous work" because its poetry includes numerous invented compound words, in order to create the island's dreamlike effect; the words are to work out their meaning in the reader's mind.²⁰ These features of the play must have fascinated Benco for the same reasons as Böcklin's art did, since much of the libretto includes intangible scenes which depended on the listener's imagination to give them a clear meaning; for example, the siren's song of enchantment or the undine creating a pearl.

There are several parallels with *The Tempest* in the libretto of *Oceana*. For example, its second act is set on the seashore of a distant island; while *The Tempest* includes the sea-storm which causes a shipwreck, *Oceana*'s sea-storm is represented by the siren's song. Both plays incorporate enchantment by the power of music. There are similarities, perhaps less tangible, in the roles of the characters. For example, Prospero is a magician and a master, and has two servants, in that resembling Init, who has Ers and Uls as servants. Miranda, just like Nersa, is a young woman, occasionally outspoken and willful.

Benco was particularly stimulated by the character of Shakespeare's Ariel. In *The Tempest*, Ariel is the invisible sprite who was for a long time imprisoned by the witch Sycorax, until Prospero, the Duke of Milan, released him. Ariel is also associated with water, as Prospero sends the fairy, in the course of the play to disguise himself as a nymph. It is interesting to notice that the moments of the play in which Shakespeare himself demanded music correspond

¹⁸ About Shakespeare's Robin, see the introduction to the play by Peter Holland in William Shakespeare 1994, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 35-48.

¹⁹ Quoted in the introduction to the play, in William Shakespeare 1999, *The Tempest*, Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, eds, *The Arden Shakespeare*, 3rd Series, Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, pp. 20-21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

with Ariel's role and its acts of enchantment.²¹ He always enters invisible, playing and singing, as for example in act I, scene II, when Ariel sings to Ferdinand "Come unto these yellow sands" (Vaughan 1999: 177) Sternfeld calls this music the "magic music", because of the power it has over people, inducing them to sleep, for example. Similarly in *Oceana*, Benco invented a whole series of spirits who exercise magic power and do so with "magic music". For example, in act II an undine, through her dancing, creates a precious pearl; the sirens singing provokes the stillness of the air and the sea, enchanting the sailors; the sea genius, Uls, magically saves Vadar's boat from sinking. The musical examples that occur in conjunction with these episodes will be discussed in section V. 4 of this chapter.

Since there are many similarities found between this opera and paintings, we will mention again Böcklin and Benco. Both artists had two inexhaustible sources of inspiration in their work: nature and imagination. In his first text for opera, *Falena* (1895), the writer created a spirit of the night: it was the nightmare (existing only in a dream) which dominated the drama.²² In the case of *Oceana*, Benco set his eyes on the sea. In his essay on this opera, which was supposed to introduce *Oceana* to the listener, Benco emphasised the straightforward nature of the libretto (without literary or symbolic overtones) and explained how the text was conceived only as text to be set to music.²³ And yet, as it will be discussed shortly, there is more to his account on *Oceana* than appears. Before investigating this libretto any further, at this point let us amplify a little on Benco's career at the time of *Oceana*.

ii. Benco's career around 1897

In 1898, Benco was still employed as a journalist for the Triestine newspaper *L'Indipendente*. While his articles concerned a wide range of topics (from political issues to an arts and theatre column), much of his time he dedicated to writing poetry and novels. From the very beginning, his early works, written in the 1890s, were regarded as having a "conquering oddity" and as containing ideas which reminded reader of "Maurice Maeterlinck's bizarre and atmospheric

²¹ See F. V. Sternfeld 1980, "Music in Shakespeare's plays", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s. v. "William Shakespeare", vol. 17, pp. 214-218.

²² It is interesting to note that there is Böcklin's picture entitled *Silence of the Forest* (or *Horror of Solitude*) (1885). Although we are not certain if Benco has seen this painting before writing the libretto of *Falena*, this is the description of the picture: "The strong evocative power of the unicorn striding out from the darkness of the forest, and the enigmatic figure of the woman riding the unicorn...", from Rolf Andree 1971, *Introduction to Arnold Böcklin 1827 – 1901*, an exhibition organized by the Arts Councils of Great Britain and Pro Helvetia Foundation of Switzerland, London Hayward Gallery 20 May – 27 June, p. 33.

²³ Benco's comment is quoted in section V. 4. i.

conceptions”.²⁴ The two novels he was working on during that period were *Il castello dei desideri* (conceived in 1894, published in 1906), and *La fiamma fredda* (1900). Their distinctive atmosphere reveals Benco’s sensitivity to the Symbolists, to the period of Decadence, and in particular to the works of its leading exponent in Italy, Gabriele D’Annunzio. The similarity to the writings of D’Annunzio is alluded to even in the titles which Benco had given to these two novels; abstract and unconventional, they resemble the poet’s *Il fuoco* (1900), *Il trionfo della morte* (1894) or *La città morta* (1896). Still, the two writers actually met and became friends only in 1902.²⁵

Although Benco’s response to the literature of the turn of the century is discussed in Chapter III, it is worth emphasising that the books which he was reading at the time had affected all his writings, including his libretti.²⁶ The subjects he was reflecting on regarded the subconscious, destructive forces of nature, and the world of dreams. The obscure themes he had chosen for the two texts for music written by 1898, *Falena* and *Oceana*, were one of the reasons why he was immediately attacked by the press following the operas’ premieres. In both cases, Benco ended up in the position of having to defend them: an example is his article, “Le origini della *Falena*”, published in 1899, prior to the opera’s first performance in Trieste.²⁷ In the case of *Oceana*, he was more careful and published an essay prior to its first performance, explaining his and Smareglia’s intentions.²⁸

Although Benco made an effort to introduce his two texts for music, the hostile party of the critics was not even nearly convinced. Some of their commentaries, for example, judged his libretti to lack “national character”, to be “non-inspirational” and most curiously, to not even be conceived for musical theatre because the “picturesque and poetic elements surpass the

²⁴ The following commentaries, such as “conquidente stranezza” and the quotation “...un richiamo alle concezioni così bizzarre e suggestive di Maurizio Maeterlinck...”, regarded the libretto of *Falena*; see Chapter IV. Both are taken from the article written by Alberto Boccardi in *La Perseveranza*, one day prior to the premiere of *Falena* in Venice in 1897. The article is quoted in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 181-184.

²⁵ Benco and D’Annunzio met in Trieste in 1902 when the poet accompanied the actress Eleonora Duse while she was performing his plays. Their friendship developed after the time they spent together on the tour around the towns of Istria which was organised in D’Annunzio’s honour and by the editorial press of the journal *Il Piccolo*. Benco also dedicated his novel *Il castello dei desideri* to the poet, while D’Annunzio became personally involved in helping Benco with the publishing of *La fiamma fredda*. See several of D’Annunzio’s letters to Emilio Treves, in Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Lettere ai Treves*, pp. 236-237 and p. 241. There are letters (sent by D’Annunzio to Benco) kept in the archives of the Biblioteca Civica “A. Hortis” in Trieste, which confirm their close friendship.

²⁶ The information about Benco reading “Rossetti, Wilde, Kipling and modern English literature” is mentioned in Benco’s autobiography, see Chapter III.

²⁷ See Chapter IV.

²⁸ It is not clear when exactly Benco had written this article, but it seems reasonable to believe that this occurred just before the premiere of the opera. The intention was to introduce this new work to the audience, and perhaps avoid not being understood; in this the artists hardly succeeded.

dramatic”.²⁹ According to Vito Levi, some aversion was felt because the libretti were too unusual:

...[C]oncepiti con dei criteri estranei alla librettistica contemporanea ligia al verismo, e soprattutto perché si presentavano con delle idee audaci e, talvolta, come poi s'è visto, precorritrici. Piacquero subito peraltro a degli spiriti colti e non prevenuti (come il Boito che per Benco librettista professò sempre una stima sincera). In sostanza, nei suoi testi per il teatro smaregliano Benco concepisce il dramma come uno scatenamento delle forze oscure che sono in noi e che di noi hanno ragione: il che avviene tanto nella *Falena* e nell'*Abisso*, il suo libretto più robusto, quanto nella commedia *Oceana*, dove, alquanto alleggerite, quelle forze operano benignamente senza tuttavia poter rinunciare del tutto alla loro vittima. [Levi, in *La Voce libera*, 8 April 1949]

[...[Benco's libretti] were conceived using criteria which did not belong to the contemporary libretto writing, which was faithful to *verismo*. Most of all, [the aversion arose because] his libretti presented ideas which were bold, and at times, as it was proved later, prophetic. His libretti were immediately liked by cultured and non prejudiced people (like Boito who always professed a sincere admiration for Benco as a librettist). Essentially, in his texts for Smareglia's theatre, Benco conceived the drama as the release of the obscure forces which reside in us and which overcome our resistance: this occurs as much in *Falena* and in *Abisso*, his most robust libretto, as in the comedy *Oceana*, where, considerably lighter, these forces operate kindly, without completely renouncing their victims.]

What was unusual about Benco's texts, besides their fantastic content, was their quest for music. In fact, Benco would often go as far as making suggestions as to how the music might be composed; as in *Falena*, “I allowed ... the gaps which were capable of containing the vast, continuous stream of symphonism: I tried to arrange, one after another, great pictures which are dominated by a single sentiment”.³⁰ When in 1906, D'Annunzio similarly approached Puccini while writing the libretto for him, his suggestions about music, as Tedeschi wittily commented, “terrorised the composer”.³¹ The event ended their collaboration for the time and made D'Annunzio say that their contacts were “sterile” and that Puccini was “appalled by the power of Poetry” (Tedeschi 1988: 48).

²⁹ “...Essa non è concepita dal punto di vista del teatro musicale, e l'elemento pittorico e quello poetico soverchiano quello drammatico”; from the article published in *Il Tempo*, 21 January 1903. Other articles on this opera are quoted from the book of Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 205-41.

³⁰ “Ho lasciato ... lacune capaci di accogliere l'ampio getto dell'ondata sinfonica: ho cercato far seguir l'uno all'altro grandi quadri dominati da un sentimento...”, from “Le origini della *Falena*”, published in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 176-181. See also the discussion in Chapter IV. 4.

³¹ Italics are my own. The libretto D'Annunzio was writing at the time was *Rosa di Ciprio*. It later became *La Pisanelle, ou la mort parfumée*, the drama for which Pizzetti was to write incidental music in 1913, see Tedeschi, *D'Annunzio e la musica*, pp. 47-48.

This step of imagining the kind of music the composer might write indicates the strong inclination which D'Annunzio and Benco felt towards music. Both authors, and D'Annunzio in particular, gave to music a primary role in their novels: either the protagonists were musicians themselves (as in *Le vergini delle rocce*, 1895 and *Il fuoco*, 1900), or they were listening to or discussing music with each other (in *Il trionfo della morte*, 1894), or they got seduced by the spell which music would create while listening to it (as in *Il piacere*, 1889, and all the above mentioned). It is curious to note that the element of music was what the respected art critic of D'Annunzio's poetry, Angelo Conti, concentrated on, when writing about the style of D'Annunzio's poetry.³² An example of how the two writers felt about music and of the endless power which they attributed to it in their work can be seen in the two following paragraphs. Their thoughts come close to the writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann and his description of "the sounding bridge of music which joins the present world with the hereafter".³³

D'Annunzio:

Soltanto alla musica è oggi dato esprimere i sogni che nascono nelle profondità della malinconia moderna, i pensieri indefiniti, i desideri senza limiti, le ansie senza causa, le disperazioni inconsolabili, tutti i turbamenti più oscuri e più angosciosi [D'Annunzio, in Tedeschi, *D'Annunzio e la musica*, p. 208]

[Only music nowadays can express the dreams which emerge from the depths of modern melancholy, the indefinite thoughts, the unlimited desires, the irrational anxieties, the inconsolable desperations, all the most obscure and agonising perturbations....]

Benco:

La musica è una specie di ponte gettato fra l'estrema realtà dell'esistenza e il principio del sogno. E come misura della grandezza interiore è presa la tensione della nostalgia che agli artisti sommi consente di attingere quel sogno, ai meno grandi di avvicinarlo solamente. [Benco, in the article by Levi, *La Voce Libera*, 8 April 1949]

[Music is a kind of bridge thrown between the ultimate reality of existence and the beginning of dream. The tension of nostalgia is taken as a measure of the greatness of man's inner self: it allows the supreme artists to grasp that dream, and the weaker only to draw near it.]

³² Mutterle, *Gabriele D'Annunzio*, p. 219. For more about *dannunzian* poetry and Angelo Conti, see *ibid* pp. 219-220. Conti was also known to have fervently supported D'Annunzio and his "teatro di poesia", see Barsotti, " 'Il teatro di poesia' ".

³³ From one of E. T. A. Hoffmann's Romantic tales, quoted in Peter Franklin 1991, *Mahler: Symphony n. 3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 11

It seems that the space conferred on music in Benco's texts was what appealed to Smareglia most, because following their collaboration with *La Falena*, the composer insisted on Benco providing his next libretto:

Egli vedeva in me un inventore di "situazioni musicali" che davano largo respiro alla sua fantasia. ...fu guidato quasi da un istinto a cercare in queste situazioni una sicura fertile terra per la gagliarda immaginazione sinfonica che sentiva salda in se quando più la perdita della vista lo imbarazzava in altre esigenze dell'opera teatrale. [Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 82]

[He saw in me an inventor of "musical situations" which opened a wide breathing-space for his fantasy.... He was guided, almost by instinct, to search in these situations a safe, fertile soil for his strong symphonic imagination. This imagination was even stronger since the loss of sight hampered him in other theatrical demands.]

As Vito Levi pointed out, Benco had the ability to recognise the composer's needs by "...creating plots in which the symphonic structure could develop fully and stir up a long echo around the action on the stage".³⁴ The poet's concern with the musical atmosphere of *Oceana*, assimilated with his own beliefs on music, brought him close to the Symbolists. His aim was shared by other writers. See, for example, the following commentary on Oscar Wilde's drama *Salome*, which pointed out "the musical form" of the play:

Again and again it seems to one that in reading one is *listening*: listening not to the author, not to the direct unfolding of the plot, but to the tones of different instruments, suggesting, suggesting, always indirectly, till one feels that by shutting one's eyes one can best catch the suggestion. [Schmidgall, *Literature as Opera*, p. 250]

It seems reasonable to believe that Smareglia could only respond to these type of images provided to him by Benco, since he was completely blind when composing *Oceana*. His need for a suggestive and evocative text led to the creation of "*teatro di poesia*".

iii. "*Teatro di poesia*"

"*Teatro di poesia*" is an expression which came closest to describing the type of operatic theatre that Benco and Smareglia wished to write. As mentioned earlier, the term did not come from the composer or the librettist themselves. It was used in the texts which investigated

³⁴ Levi's comment is as follows: "Benco seppe svegliare nel maestro delle facoltà inventive rimaste ancora latenti, costruendogli dei drammi ove il respiro sinfonico potesse svolgersi diffusamente, così da suscitare una lunga eco intorno alla vicenda della scena", see Levi, in *La Voce Libera*, 8 April 1949.

libretto writing at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, and in particular when Gabriele D'Annunzio, one of the most important poets of the time in Italy, became involved in it.³⁵

There are occasional references in Benco's writings which explain how he created the libretti. He spoke openly about his more *poetic* than *dramatic* approach to the task, and such accounts have led critics to try to capture the poetic element and describe it accordingly. For example, as early as in his first text for music, *La Falena*, Benco explained that he had a "conception of the theatre which would have in itself a musical soul".³⁶ He went on further, suggesting the musicality of his idea (Falena - as a symbol of the night), which would provide "...almost the elements of a kind of dramatic dance".³⁷ It was the critic Agostino Cameroni who, in his review following *Oceana*'s premiere, recognised the nature of the opera:

...[M]a chi l'ha mai sognato che *Oceana* fosse un'azione nel comune senso della parola...? Non si è predicato ... che questo libretto del Benco non era che una poetica fantasia? Non fu ieri sera stessa da tutti riconosciuto che questa fantasia offre eccitamento di suggestione intensa per il musicista?³⁸
[Cameroni, in *Lega Lombarda*, 23 January 1903]

[Who has ever dreamt that *Oceana* was a story in the common sense of the word...? Was it not maintained ... that Benco's libretto was only a poetic fantasy? Was it not last night recognised by everyone that this fantasy provides an intensely suggestive stimulus for the composer?]

Finding such expressions as "*poetica fantasia*", or "*pure sfere della poesia*" in the early articles on *Oceana* helps us understand why the more recent reviewers write about it as "*teatro di poesia*".³⁹ Although it is not clear when or by whom it was first used of the Benco-Smareglia works, this phrase can be found in the introduction to the collection of musical writings of Benco, written by Gianni Gori and Isabella Gallo, with an introductory essay by Gianandrea Gavazzeni.⁴⁰ Soon after Benco's *Scritti musicali* were published, the term was adopted further in the critical reviews, such as those by Fedele D'Amico. D'Amico's opinion can be quoted as an example, as it emphasised that it was this "poetic theatre" which was to direct the composer towards a new musical form:

³⁵ See discussion in Chapter I. 2.

³⁶ "...Quella concezione di teatro che già avesse in se stessa un'anima musicale...", in "Le origini della *Falena*". See also Chapter IV. 4.

³⁷ "...[Q]uasi elementi d'una sorta di drammatica danza", in *ibid.*

³⁸ The review by Agostino Cameroni must have appeared in *Lega Lombarda* on 23 January 1903. It is quoted in Mario Smareglia 1934, pp. 219-225, but with an ambiguous indication as being from *L'illustrazione Italiana* because, in the article by Gaetano Boldrini (in *ibid.*, pp. 230-233) the author mentioned Cameroni's article being written for *Lega Lombarda*.

³⁹ The quotations are by G. B. Nappi, *ibid.*, p. 225.

⁴⁰ See Benco, *Scritti musicali*.

[N]ella sua estetizzante e dannunzianeggiante ambizione al *teatro di poesia* lo scrittore avvierà il compositore a soddisfare le aspirazioni culturalistiche che Boito va reclamizzando, e che ai veristi sono estranee...⁴¹

[In his ambition towards *poetic theatre*, an ambition comprising both aestheticism and dannunzianism, the writer will direct the composer to fulfill those cultural aspirations which Boito is campaigning for and which are not shared by veristi.]

In the previously mentioned introduction to *Scritti musicali*, the authors used this expression just as it had been used some seventy years earlier: either in describing the nature of the poet's libretti, or in stressing that "*teatro di poesia*" was what the artists wished to create.

A similar expression was used in an article which offered a viewpoint on the changes in libretto writing at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. The author, Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol, discussed text for music as "libretto di *poesia*". According to Corazzol, the difference between the traditional libretto and libretto di *poesia* was its literary form: the second was more complex because the role of the poetic verse was more intellectual and evocative. Such libretti were perhaps less popular ("*impopolari o senza mercato*") but were regarded as new, and more original. It was among these more original solutions that the author mentioned Benco, finding an example of "*versi liberi per musica*" in Benco's *Falena* (1895).⁴² In an earlier article, Corazzol noted the elements of the poetic in Illica's libretto *Iris* (Rome 1898) which was set to music by Mascagni. It is noteworthy that the author reached for a word such as 'poetic' in order to discuss Illica's stage directions: they are descriptive, symphonic, more evocative and symbolic than stage directions would normally be, commenting verbally on how the music should be composed.⁴³

We return to the idea of a "poetic theatre". As was mentioned earlier, the Italian writer whose work most relates to "*teatro di poesia*" is Gabriele D'Annunzio.⁴⁴ His close involvement with the operatic theatre developed when several of his plays were chosen as settings for libretti, starting with *La figlia di Iorio*, set to music by Franchetti (Milan 1906).⁴⁵ However, the influence D'Annunzio exerted on musical theatre and literature reaches back before 1906. The

⁴¹ D'Amico, "Nelle braccia di D'Annunzio", in *L'Espresso*, 30 March 1975.

⁴² Corazzol, "Scrittori-Librettisti e Librettisti-Scrittori tra Scapigliatura e Decadence (Ghislanzoni, Praga, Fontana, Leoncavallo)". See also Chapter IV, section IV. 4. iii.

⁴³ Corazzol 1993, " 'Fatte un chiasso da demoni colle palme e coi talloni!': la disgregazione dei livelli di cultura nell'Opera italiana tra Ottocento e Novecento", in *Opera and libretto II*, Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, p. 398.

⁴⁴ See the discussion in Chapter I. 2. Tedeschi also discusses "teatro di poesia", in Tedeschi, *D'Annunzio e la musica*, p. 23.

⁴⁵ An overview of the repertory of new Italian operas written up to the First World War is provided in Chapter VI, also Appendix C, Time line 3 and 4.

poet's effort to create "an ideal book of modern prose" was mentioned in Chapter IV. The novel *Il trionfo della morte* written in 1894 consisted of what he described as a "plastic and symphonic prose, rich in imagery and music". A similar concept, in the field of theatre, was D'Annunzio's longing to invent a "new modern tragedy". Although a more detailed discussion of his influence and of the poet's theatrical works goes beyond the space and aim of this research, it is relevant to point out that in the period from 1897 to 1914 D'Annunzio wrote fifteen plays which he "aptly defined as 'tragedies, mysteries, dreams'", many of which ended up being set to music (Pontiero 1982: 16).⁴⁶ Furthermore, it was noticed that the elements of his concept for a "poetic theatre", for example the evocative and *musical* language, the episodic unfolding of the drama, the indulgence in details and, in particular, narrative (instead of merely functional) stage directions, were also inherent in his prose works. A particularly curious case is his novel *Il fuoco* (1900), whose language Tedeschi described as being so poetic that all it lacked was "to be broken up into free verse" (*spezzatura del verso libero*) (Tedeschi 1988: 24).⁴⁷

A kind of "poetic theatre" even formed part of D'Annunzio's novel, *Il fuoco* (1900). The plot, largely autobiographical, is set in Venice and deals with the love between the protagonists, the actress Foscarina and Stelio, who is a poet and a musician.⁴⁸ Within the story there is a sub plot: Stelio's longing for the creation of a "new musical Latin theatre", for which he would write the text, while the singer Donatella (with whom he is in love) would perform the vocal part. He senses that the only possible "new art" is the one which involves music; as in Greek tragedy, it would unite poetry, sound and dance.⁴⁹ The fact that the protagonist bears in himself this "*poema sonoro*" (Tedeschi 1988: 24) and that he would be the author of both music and the text for this type of drama reveals the similarity to the creations of Richard Wagner. In fact, as Tedeschi pointed out, *Il fuoco* is a novel in which the poet "identified himself with the German composer", primarily to supersede him. In other words, the revival of the Latin theatre was conceived in opposition to German theatre.⁵⁰ The "*poema sonoro*" or the "poetic theatre" was conceived by the protagonists as the kind of " 'tragedy' destined to find 'its perfect balance between the two forces which ... animate it, between the power of the stage and the power of the orchestra' ". Tedeschi further described the effect of such work, noting that above the dense

⁴⁶ The period corresponds to the time during which *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* were written and staged.

⁴⁷ The author Barsotti also points out the example of *Il fuoco* as being 'essentially work of poetry', see Barsotti, "Il 'teatro di poesia' ", p. 23.

⁴⁸ *Il fuoco* is seen by many scholars as the novel "romanzo-diario", in which the poet portrayed his relationship with Eleonora Duse (in the play recognised as Foscarina). See Tedeschi, *D'Annunzio e la musica*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ See also Mutterle, *Gabriele D'Annunzio*, p. 84.

⁵⁰ Wagner's presence is seen everywhere in the book. Besides the fact that in the novel Stelio meets the composer, and is one of the people who carries Wagner's coffin upon the composer's death, there are numerous discussions in the course of the story which revolve around Wagner's ideas of reuniting all the arts. For more on D'Annunzio and his attitude towards Wagner's art see Tedeschi, *D'Annunzio e la musica*.

orchestral flow the voices would rise “ ‘from the symphonies in order to resolve in the end into the movements of dance, between one episode to another’ ”.⁵¹ What comes through from this description, is the important part music plays in his theatrical works. The same is true in the writings of Benco and particularly in his libretto for *Oceana*.

V. 4 The music of *Oceana*

i) *Tone poetry*

The poetic idea was really the formative element.... [Strauss, on his *Aus Italien* op. 16]

In discussing the music of *Oceana*, it seems most appropriate to start with the element of the poetic, as the opera is pervaded by atmospheric tone painting. The need for atmospheric painting, initially created by the libretto, stimulated the abundance of orchestral music, the result being what Gabriel Fauré had said about *Salome*: “a symphonic poem with voices on top”.⁵² The *quasi*-mythological marine setting was carefully chosen by Benco and Smareglia since they firmly believed that the element of the fantastic could be best evoked by music.⁵³ Furthermore, with this opera, both the librettist and the composer were crystal clear about their ambition. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is Benco’s commentary to the opera that explains their intentions:

Noi vogliamo presentarci con quadri di paesaggio scenico e di musica sui quali scorra un’azione di esseri fluidi, leggeri, impregnati di una poesia che tolga loro alquanto della imponderabilità delle creature terrene, di modo che tutto sia come un riverbero lontano della vita e di un’impressione continua di fantasmagoria in un soggiorno di pura musica. Perciò dato il concetto di musicalità intima che è la sua sola ragione di essere, s’avrebbe torto di considerare il libretto di *Oceana* come un’opera estranea alla sua musica. Esso è fatto coll’intento preciso che portato sul teatro, se ne svolga una grande e continua sinfonia.⁵⁴

[We want to present our work with these pictures of scenic landscapes and music on which flows a drama of light, fluid beings, impregnated with a kind of poetry which removes from them a fair amount of the imponderability of earthly creatures, in order to make everything seem like a distant

⁵¹ “...[D]alle sinfonie per risolversi alla fine in figure di danza, tra l’uno e l’altro episodio”, Tedeschi, *D’Annunzio e la musica*, p. 24.

⁵² From Jean - Michel Nectoux 1991, *Gabriel Faure: a Musical Life*, trans. by Roger Nichols, Cambridge University Press, pp. 314-315.

⁵³ The complete quotation of Smareglia’s comment is as following: “...Il fantastico è stato scelto pensando che in questo elemento, meglio che in alcun altro, la arte musicale può raggiungere il massimo dello sviluppo e la massima importanza”, from the interview with Smareglia, published in *Cronache Musicali e Drammatiche*, Rome 8 October 1902.

⁵⁴ From *Il Corriere della Sera* [?] Milan 23 January, 1903, [n. a.].

echo of life and of a continuous impression of phantasmagoria in a realm of pure music. And so, since the concept of intimate musicality is its only *raison d'être*, it would be wrong to consider the libretto of *Oceana* independently of its music. It is conceived with the precise intention that, when it is brought to the theatre, it would unfold in a grand, continuous symphonic music.]

The key words in this passage are “pictures of landscapes and music” which Benco used to begin to describe their work, as if the opera was about the presenting of pictures on stage, set to music. It appears that the quoted part of Benco’s text could have been written as a description of a painting. In fact, both Smareglia and he often referred to *Oceana* as his own “fresco” (*affresco*), “painting or canvas” (*tela*). Again, one is reminded of the visual stimulus: at the back of Benco’s mind was not one but a whole parade of Böcklin’s pictures, his *Meeresbilder*,⁵⁵ of which the following notably resemble the scenes in *Oceana*: *The Naiads at play* (1886, Basel Öffentliche Kunstsammlung) [see **Illustration n. 12**, p. 132], *Calm sea* (1887, Bern Kunstmuseum), *Triton and Nereid* (1875, composition study, Darmstadt Hessisches Landesmuseum), and *The play of the waves* (1883, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen München).⁵⁶ There is a particularly close resemblance between the painting *Faun, eine schlafende Nymphe belauschend* (*Faun, listening to the sleeping Nymph*, 1885, New York, private collection) and the scene at the beginning of act II in which the sea geniuses, Ers and Uls, gaze at the young girl Nersa while she is asleep. This image was extended in Smareglia’s music as *canzone alla dormente*, a lullaby sang by the old sea genius Uls to the sleeping Nersa at the start of act II.

Animated in Benco’s verses, such picturesque bases influenced the composer’s imagination, and were bound to determine the musical form. The second act is a particularly good example. It is in the second act that Benco provides most space for what he called “pure music” (*musica pura*). The setting of act II (nightfall on the seashore) resulted in a series of musical images such as the sea nocturne, the arrival of the tritons, the lullaby, the dance of the waves and others. It is no surprise that Smareglia had, while still writing the opera, assembled these episodes and arranged them as the movements for a suite; these came to be known as *notturmo marino*, *arrivo dei tritoni*, *canzone alla dormente*, and *danza delle ondine*.⁵⁷ Several sections

⁵⁵ From Andrea Linnenbach, *Arnold Böcklin und die antike. Mythos – Geschichte – Gegenwart*. München: Hurmer Verlag. It is not certain if Benco had actually seen all of these paintings.

⁵⁶ A more detailed investigation of Böcklin’s art work has revealed a remarkable similarity of the characters or scenes from his pictures with the images in Benco’s *Oceana*. Besides those already mentioned, there are more of Böcklin’s paintings which could also have inspired Benco. These paintings are: *Breakers on the shore* (1879), *Triton blowing on a conch* (1881), *Ruins on the shore* (1880) and the images of *Edge of the forest with Centaur and Nymph* (1856?) and *Pan and Syrinx* (1897).

⁵⁷ The reasons why Smareglia came to write an orchestral suite out of this opera are discussed in Chapter II.

from this act will be looked at closely, as they explain why there is *so* much music in the opera, and because they are exemplary for Smareglia's "teatro di poesia".



"*Oceana*" - Atto II.

(Dall'*Illustrazione Italiana*)

Disegno di A. Tenz

Illustration 13: *Oceana*, act II, Nersa at the beach (the encounter with Init), from *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, 1903, included in Mario Smareglia's book.

Example V A: *Sea nocturne* [see Appendix E. 1]

The description of a “sea nocturne”, often given to the opening prelude to act II, at times also to the whole second act (Perpich 1990: 135), captures the mood which Smareglia’s music evokes. The stimulus to his imagination came from Benco’s introductory stage settings, which in summary are as following:

nightfall on the beach, illuminated by the moonlight; waves rolling to and from the sandy beach, where, in a corner, resting on a pillow of seaweed, Nersa is asleep; from the sea, amongst the waves, the two sea geniuses emerge.

This image of the moonlit night has been anticipated at the end of act I, when the chorus of peasants, along with Hareb, comment about the mysteries of a night at sea. That finale is a large scene, which involves a full-scale orchestra and two choirs; the voices, at times, are further subdivided, while one chorus is placed off-stage. The orchestral texture is rich with thematic development, at first arabesque-like, and interwoven among the instruments and the voices. We can notice Smareglia’s preference for using sustained harmonies as a basis for decoration with appoggiaturas and passing notes [v. s. p. 99–100] or, his use of slow moving chords animated by arpeggio patterns, tremolos, and sudden modulation: for example the sequence of dominant seventh chords from A to E flat and then to D flat [v. s. p. 102/2/2- 103/1/1, and through to p. 110].

In the prelude to act II, the picture that has been established is developed further. The composer retains the pedal chords but moves them a semitone higher: the tonal contrast of Aflat (act I) to A major (act II) reinforces the passage from the human and the marine world. The musical texture begins dark, as the lower strings, together with bass clarinet and bassoon, employ the discreet tremolo on the pedal notes of the tonic chord [see v. s. p. 113]. There is a harmonic stasis for the next thirty bars, above which we hear the motif of tritons’ horns, while violas, followed by violins, continuously wind their figures, adding more movement to the tonic opening.

Once all the other brass and woodwind instruments have been assembled, we are introduced to the two new themes [v. s. p. 113/4/3-114/7/3; see also **Thematic guide**, p. 157, n. 12 and 12a]. Their descending lyrical melody is set in an irregular rhythmic movement, adopting a meditative character in both of them. It is noticeable that these themes appear several times; their varied repetitions (played either by solo clarinet, oboe, flute or the three of them together) fix these melodies in our mind. Particularly subtle is the change of harmonic colour in one of them (theme 12a): there is a succession of seventh chords which move fluidly from the dominant pedal on E towards the dominant on A, never resolving in a clear tonality [v. s.

p.114/4/3-114/7/3]. Besides reinforcing the established poetic atmosphere, these themes acquire the association with the beach, as the composer plays them later on in the act: theme n. 12a when Init first sees Nersa asleep on the seashore, and theme n. 12 when Nersa leaves the beach at the end of act II.⁵⁸

Due personaggi dell'opera
"Oceana" in disegni tratti da
una rivista dell'epoca.

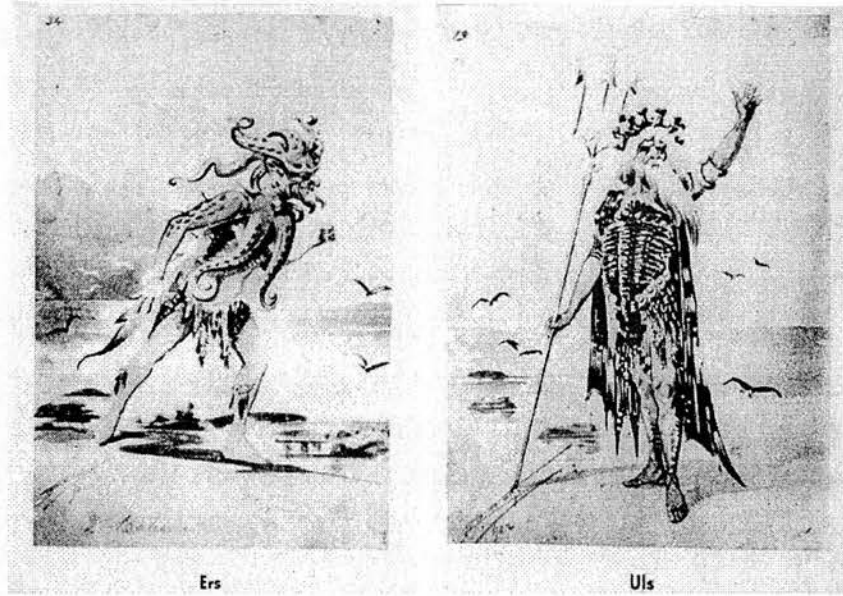


Illustration 14: Ers and Uls, stage design from 1903, included in Mario Smareglia's book.

Example V B: *Undines' dance* [see Appendix E. 2]

The factor which possibly explains why Benco wrote a libretto which was so *undramatic* is his concern for the movement on stage rather than for the unfolding of the drama. He explained that what he is looking for is the "movement of fluid beings" which flows "above the pictures of landscape and music". As long as these pictorial scenes give "an impulse to the vast pictures of symphonic music", their work is done. When looking at the scenes in the libretto such as the "dance of the waves", it is obvious that it was designed not so much to intensify the drama as to inspire more poetic depth in the music, which is exactly what Smareglia achieved.

⁵⁸ See also discussion on p. 163.

The moment when the nymphs are about to dance in order to create a pearl follows the long awaited encounter of Init and Nersa, who has by now been renamed Oceana. The dance, designed to enhance the joyful atmosphere, is based on a theme of a very distinctive rhythm with an accentuated first beat (three semiquavers), followed by short and detached quavers on the remaining three beats of the bar [see **Example V B, Theme 1**]:

Example V B: *Undines' dance*

Theme 1



Theme 2



The consistent repetition of this particular rhythmic figure in the theme, and its decorative and chromatic melody are accompanied by the pedal notes (perfect fifth) in the natural A minor key. These qualities give to the theme, which is played by the woodwinds (flute, clarinet and sometimes oboe), something of an ‘oriental’ temper, very possibly to allude to the opera’s Syrian ambience.

The dance includes two main sections which are repeated, forming a single movement of four parts, played without a break. The two sections differ in mood and pace: while the second section [v. s. p. 168/4/1- 172/2/1] is slightly slower in pace, and more lyrical, the first section [v. s. p. 164/2/3 - 168/3/2] is rhythmically dynamic and is given colorful orchestration in which the groups of instruments interact with the whole ensemble (as do the strings for example, v. s. p. 164/5/2-165/1/4). Two themes can be identified in the dance, and are both introduced in the first section. The second theme [see **Example V B, Theme 2**], although endowed with vigour is in contrasting mood to the first, and evolves in the violins, with some evocative touches resembling the ‘Hungarian’ dances of Brahms [v. s. 166/2/1 – 4]. The composer develops the thematic material in several ways, for example by using fragments of the main theme, while gradually assembling the second theme in its full form or by transforming some fractions of the main theme [changing the motion of the theme’s short, detached quavers v. s. p. 166/1/2].

Another effective sonority is achieved in the superimposition of the two main themes [for example v. s. p. 166/4/3 - 167/3/1].⁵⁹

Example V C: *The sea spell* [see Appendix E. 3]

The perception that Smareglia's *Oceana* is "basically untheatrical" (Budden 1987: 330) and that the "picturesque and poetic surpass the elements of dramatic",⁶⁰ embodies another particular aspect of *Oceana* which is easily underestimated, and which one might describe as 'latent dramaturgy'. In spite of the later criticism about the opera lacking dramatic strength, and being over-abundant with music, the fact remains that the intention of Benco was to supply the composer with the kind of opportunities which would most inspire his gifts, one of which is Smareglia's ability as the *sinfonista* or *pittore* (G. B. Nappi). The settings provided by the libretto, besides being picturesque, were vivid and had their own inner tale which was to be awakened by music. Perhaps the *dramatic* elements in them were not so intense but through music, these images and their characters came alive.

A good example is the scene of the sea spell. The episode follows a moment in the plot, half way through the second act, in which the inhabitants of the sea world are disturbed by the arrival of the humans. Nersa recognises that it is Vadar's boat approaching them from the distance. While all the sea creatures are panicking to be seen by the humans, the God of the sea, Init, is particularly upset by the possibility of losing his new future bride. He cannot let her go, and is wondering what to do in order to stop her leaving. One of the sea geniuses, Ers, suggests to him that he should order the sirens to sing; the magic of their song will trouble the sailors' souls, becalm the sea and sink the boat. Although Init finds this idea rather cruel, there is no time to think about it. He gives an order to the sirens to sing *l'incantesimo* (the spell). Suddenly all becomes quiet, and the sea surface still. Gradually, the soft voices are heard arising from the depths of the ocean. The boat, after a few moments, stops sailing.

At this point of the plot there was the opportunity to insert a violent sea tempest which would involve a turbulent shipwreck. However, Benco chose to have more gentle activity on stage and express the tumultuous sea through powerful music, the sea spell sung by the mermaids. Again, as in Böcklin's pictures, *The play of the waves* and *The Naiads at play*, he adds more movement to the stage: the characters jump into the waves, agitating the surface of the sea.

⁵⁹ There are several dance scenes which can be found in Smareglia's operas. The most famous, at times still performed nowadays, are the "Hungarian dances" (Danze Ungheresi) from his opera *Il Vassallo di Szigeth* (Vienna 1889).

⁶⁰ Cf. footnote 29 on pp. 139-140.

Benco's stage directions, just before the scene of the sea spell, were as follows: *great silence rests for a moment above the water; gradually sweet and wicked voices rise from the waves, at times louder at others feebly; Nersa, kneeling down, listens to them, terrified; the boat advances a few steps, then stops.*

When the sirens' voices start to emerge from the sea, the intensity of the alarming event which is about to happen to the boat is felt in the atmosphere. We can sense that something *dramatic* is about to happen, but Benco's means of directing it are light: instead of provoking a sea storm, he creates a 'song of enchantment'.

Smareglia gives this scene the character of an orchestral interlude with the voices heard off stage. The music concentrates entirely on interweaving all of the *sea motifs* [see **Thematic guide**, p. 155-157 n. 5, 8, 9,10] which up to this point of the plot, appear only sporadically.

What distinguishes the texture of this scene from the previous one, besides the new motivic material, is its slower pace and particularly effective harmonic language. At the beginning the music shifts from Bflat to the key of F; Smareglia again uses sustained harmonies, decorating them temporarily with chromatically altered chords, or at times with a group of appoggiaturas, which then dissolve in more consonant chords [v. s. p. 189 b. 11-12, 16-18; p. 190 b. 4-5; p. 191 b. 2, 5, 6]. The brief orchestral introduction [v. s. p. 189/2/1-190/1/3] unfolds the sea motifs (n. 8 and n. 9), and gradually condenses the texture with more movement; motif n. 8 for example, is affected by the rhythmic changes from 4/4, 6/4 to 9/8. The musical structure of the whole section of the sea spell is underlined by an incessant fluctuating of chords: there are 7th, 9th or 13th based chords, secondary dominants and their inversions. Despite such harmonic richness and its sudden chromaticism, the key of F major predominates through the whole section [v. s. p. 189-193] and is never seriously displaced. The essentially static harmonic basis is only on one occasion undermined by a brief modulation into A major [v. s. p. 193/2/1-2].

The music texture is condensed further by the entrance of the female chorus whose voices (soprano and contralto) are used coloristically. Instead of a recitative or a 'song', the sirens sing as if they were strands within the orchestra, their phrases being formed from the melodic shape of two of the sea motifs: the chromatically winding theme (n. 5), and the sinuous melody of parallel thirds (n. 8). The musical complexity is enhanced further by the text which accompanies the sirens' melodies: if we look at the libretto of this scene, we can note that it is 'fractured', consisting of exceptionally long and irregularly set verses [libretto p. 54-55].⁶¹ The

⁶¹ The exact counting of the syllables results with 21 – syllable lines, or 18 syllable; we can note that the words contain 3-syllables; their reciting obtains a steady pulse and enhances the 'hypnotic' effect, for example: "Ardito nocchiero, che peschi con l'avidò sguardo ne' flutti d'argento/ se un corpo di donna tu scorgi errabondo, deh! Credi che l'occhio delira..." see libretto p. 54.

two sea motifs sung by the sirens form the heart of the ‘magic music’ and are repeated several times. Their recurrences seem identical: Smareglia creates an immutable effect by holding on to the same harmonic basis, which is enriched by subtle decorative figures. Gradually, the whole setting feels more intense as the sirens continue to echo their melody, in a dialogue with the orchestra. To increase the effect, the composer again, as at the end of act I, subdivides the chorus voices [v. s. p. 193-198]. The spell episode comes to an end when the young Nersa herself becomes upset by the sirens’ song, begging Uls to stop it.

What makes this scene particularly poetic, besides its setting, is the manner in which the composer evokes the elements of the fantastic in it. The music is persuasive not so much because it is repeated numerous times but rather because it *moves* persuasively. This can be seen in the melodic contour of the sea motifs themselves, their winding chromaticism, the complex harmonic structures, as well as the rich orchestration, which in this scene, more than anywhere else in the opera, employs harp and celesta. Although the effect of such music works to depict the atmospheric, and may seem “untheatrical”, it still carries through the turning point of the plot and intensifies the events which follow.

ii) *Leitmotifs*

In the previous section there was mention of how the narrative features of the libretto and its poetic ideas greatly influenced the formal design of the opera. Illustrations of it were provided with act II and its episodic sections which, as was noted earlier, the composer came to assemble into a suite. In evoking such picturesque episodes Smareglia developed a series of musical images. Within their abundant orchestral textures we can trace a network of musical ideas which the composer often repeats, transforms and develops in order to articulate the drama and its set atmosphere.

Leitmotifs play an important part of the opera’s ongoing musical flow and of its overall musico-dramatic unity. However, with such musical or poetic objectives for writing the opera, it remains difficult to clearly determine whether and to what extent these leading themes also have dramatic implications.⁶² The following analysis of the leading themes in the opera reveal that Smareglia used the leitmotif technique also for dramatic purposes; the example seen earlier was the scene of siren’s ‘enchantment song’ in act II which employed a dense series of *sea* motifs. The present section draws special attention at the instances and various manners in which the composer employed particular musical ideas.

⁶² See the discussion on Smareglia’s musical language in Chapter I.

In *Oceana* there are twelve most characteristic themes which, in the course of the drama, accompany some of the principal characters, their mood, an established atmosphere or an idea. The motifs in question, all endowed with their own distinctive sound, are as follows: the motif of *Uls* (n. 1), *Init's love* (n. 2), *Hareb* (n. 3), *Wedding motif* (n. 3a), *Vadar's love* (n. 4), motif of the *sea spell* (n. 5), *Ers motif* (n. 6), *Nersa's song* (n. 7), *sirens' song* (n. 8), the *sea motifs* (n. 9 and n. 10), the motif of *love* (n. 11) and Nersa's association with the *beach* (n. 12 and 12a) [see **Thematic guide, p. 155-7**].⁶³

OCEANA – THEMATIC GUIDE

[1] Uls

Largo ♩ = 96



f

[2] Init's love

Andante sostenuto

p

[3] Hareb

C Bass Bsn

[3a] “wedding” motif

⁶³ The most significant motifs are included in the present list; the numbers in the square brackets correspond to the order of their appearance in the opera's overture, and are being used for easier reference. Although the labels of these motifs, for the most part, derive from Levi, "*Oceana*": *piccola guida verso l'opera*, this study for the first time names, examines and lists the collection of principal themes of the opera. Levi's work on *Oceana* represents the first more serious attempt towards the understanding of Smareglia's compositional style.

[4] Vadar’s love

Musical score for [4] Vadar’s love. The score is in 2/4 time, key of D major. The melody is in the treble clef, starting with a half note D4, followed by a half note E4, then a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4. The bass line is in the bass clef, starting with a half note D3, followed by a half note E3, then a quarter note F#3, and a quarter note G3. The dynamic is *mf*.

[5] Sea “spell”

Il movimento un poco piu tratto $\text{♩} = 63$

Musical score for [5] Sea “spell”. The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major. The melody is in the treble clef, starting with a half note D4, followed by a half note E4, then a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4. The bass line is in the bass clef, starting with a half note D3, followed by a half note E3, then a quarter note F#3, and a quarter note G3. The dynamic is *f*.

[6] Ers

Musical score for [6] Ers. The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major. The melody is in the treble clef, starting with a half note D4, followed by a half note E4, then a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4. The bass line is in the bass clef, starting with a half note D3, followed by a half note E3, then a quarter note F#3, and a quarter note G3. The dynamic is *f*. Fl. Clar. Hp.

[7] Nersa

Tempo I. ($\text{♩} = 116$)

Musical score for [7] Nersa. The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major. The melody is in the treble clef, starting with a half note D4, followed by a half note E4, then a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4. The bass line is in the bass clef, starting with a half note D3, followed by a half note E3, then a quarter note F#3, and a quarter note G3. The dynamic is *p espr.*

[8] Sea motif

Musical score for [8] Sea motif. The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major. The melody is in the treble clef, starting with a half note D4, followed by a half note E4, then a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4. The bass line is in the bass clef, starting with a half note D3, followed by a half note E3, then a quarter note F#3, and a quarter note G3. The dynamic is *f*.

[9] Sea motifPiu sostenuto $\text{♩} = 69$ **[10] Sea motif****[11] Love theme****[12] Nersa/ “beach”**

Ob. Fl. Clar.

[12a] Nersa/ “beach”

In order to illustrate a variety of themes and the different occasions in which Smareglia uses them, let us take a closer look at a few cases. It is interesting to examine with the motif associated with the sea genius **Ers** [n. 6] as the composer gives it a very distinctive shape of a broken chord: a fast succession of descending and ascending triplets:

“Ers” motif

Fl. Clar. Hp.

Given the velocity of its movement, coated in the augmented chord, the theme acts as an ‘interruption’, and sounds capricious, depicting Ers’s mischievous character. This musical idea accompanies Ers throughout the opera, its appearances adapting to the dramatic situation. For example, the motif is noticeably transformed at the moment when Ers tries to persuade Nersa to run away with him half way through act I. The composer achieves this gradually by unfolding the motif, using its section (two sets of double triplets) and modeling it into a new shape [v. s. p. 63; see **Example I. 3. B in Chapter I, p. 10**]. The melodic phrase which follows is turned more lyrical and charming: its interval structure is modified into a mild, tender melody, its rhythm moved into the triple time, and its augmented chord ‘fixed’ to A major and its dominant chord. The motif, reacting to the event on stage, is transformed into the triplets of a new melodic line, and is used as the main thematic material in escorting their departure, and leading into the following scene [v. s. p. 64-67]. The same change affects this leitmotif in act II when Ers talks to Init, reminding him that he is deserving of the precious pearl since he found for Init his future bride [v. s. p. 162-163].

Vadar [n. 4], the chief of the Noat tribe, remains fixed in our mind through his ‘love theme’ which he sings to Nersa; it is a simple, melancholic phrase:

“Vadar” motif



It is curious to note the dramatic context in which Vadar’s theme initially appears: the first time we hear it is not when Vadar comes into sight, but as a part of Nersa’s *arioso*, earlier in act I. This scene is a static moment of the plot, in which Nersa tells Ers about Vadar’s love, and of her mixed feelings about it [v. s. p. 42/2/1-2]. The motif clearly accompanies Vadar later on in the act, from the scene in which he finds out about her escape [v. s. p. 71/2/3 –71/3/1]. At this point, the music is pervaded by Vadar’s theme, at first played in unison in dark, low registers of clarinet, violoncelli and contrabass. The motif’s intervallic structure and rhythm are initially more rigid; following Vadar’s agitated recitative, the theme advances into his vocal line (accompanied by oboe and trombone), intensifying the depth of Vadar’s feelings for her.

From this moment of the plot the motif continuously reflects Vadar’s emotional state: he uses it while threatening everyone who dares to criticise Nersa’s escape [short, faster, rhythmically modified statement in both vocal part and the orchestra, v. s. p. 85], or while revealing his own

fear of losing her [v. s. p. 94 and 97]. Among interesting appearances of this leitmotif is, for example, the scene in act II, when the sea genius Uls notices a boat in the distance: the music in the orchestra tells us it is the boat of Vadar (and Hareb) [v. s. p. 182]. On another occasion, the dramatic situation is intensified by the *absence* of the motif when, towards the end of act III, Vadar asks Init to cast a spell on him in order to forget his love for Nersa. For Vadar “Nersa’s love has vanished”: it is interesting that in this moment Vadar’s melody gains the shape of the motif of Init instead [v. s. p. 255-256].

“Init’s theme distorted”



The most systematically conducted leitmotif in *Oceana* is the one of the sea genius Uls [n. 1]. This motif claims our attention first not only because it is the one with which the opera (its overture) begins, but also because of its majestic musical character. Its solemn entrance, played by the English horn, clarinets and trumpets creates the effect of ceremonial, almost ‘baroque’ music, with which the composer introduces the listener to the opera’s marine world. The motif gradually unfolds into a theme: its modal sonority is created from a slow, homophonic progression of the triads based on the secondary degrees of D major.



The motif has several musical features which the composer uses and develops separately: the most obvious is the fast descending movement (two demisemiquavers falling on a longer note or on a chord), and the chord itself, at times played as a single beat, at others as a longer note under which there is different accompanying material.

Throughout the opera we can trace the way the composer employs the motif mainly by dividing and interweaving its two main parts. However, on two occasions these fragments are assembled and unfold into a longer theme; in both instances the motif is distinguished by the change of tempo to *Largo*, and by a change to a more homophonic texture. On both occasions the theme emphasises the role of the ‘wise prophet’ Uls is called to play in the story. He seems to appear

always in the crucial moments of the plot to restore order.⁶⁴ One example accompanies the first entrance of Uls in act I, “*Ascoltatemi*”, the scene in which Nersa’s escape from the tribe has to be judged [v. s. p. 87-89].

Uls’ appearance is first announced by the orchestra; Smareglia builds up the association of the motif with the character by developing a short motivic preparation, prior to and along with Uls’ arrival on stage. The first time we can identify the beginning of the motif is in the short interlude which follows the entrance of Nersa and Uls among the peasants. Its ‘insistent’ reappearance [v. s. p. 79; see **Example I. 3. A, Chapter I, p. 10**] forms the new thematic material in the texture, whose meaning we come to learn later on, once Uls introduces himself. On the second occasion we hear the fragment faster, less transformed and decisively repeated [v. s. p. 85-87]. Another scene during which Uls suddenly appears in order to solve the problem of the love triangle occurs in act III. Again, the orchestra employs the motif prior to Uls’ appearance by continuously repeating its beginning, and varying the intervallic structure within it. This is followed by motif’s full statement, its slower and more solemn mood reinforces the impact of what he has to say to Init, Vadar and Nersa: Smareglia plays it in its original key of D major, and releases the accumulated tension of the plot [v. s. p. 241-244].

The most ambiguous motif in the opera is the one associated with **Hareb** [n. 3]

[3] Hareb



[3a] “wedding” motif



The ambiguity does not relate to the way Smareglia represents Hareb’s character; in fact, the treatment is similar to the motif of Uls or Ers. What is strange is the motif’s resemblance to the *wedding* motif [n. 3a, see **Example V D, p. 161**]. Both include a strong descending interval (usually perfect 4th or 5th) followed by a group of four staccato quavers [‘wedding’ motif] or semiquavers [Hareb]. There are further, more subtle differences, such as the four semiquavers *moving* differently (in the opposite direction) from the four quavers of the *wedding* motif. Furthermore, Hareb’s motif is preceded by two semiquavers which come on the weak beat, and this particular fragment of the motif is often used and developed separately.

⁶⁴ The sea genius Uls is not quite as innocent as may appear at first: for example, his idea of leaving Nersa alone on a distant beach for three days was planned in order to make it possible for the sea God, Init, to meet her.

Although the musical features indicate that the two motifs could derive one from another, and could possibly be considered as the two different versions of the same musical idea, several occasions can be found in which the motifs are identified behaving as independent themes. It is particularly curious that the *wedding* motif features as the main subject in the overture to the opera. Furthermore, it is relevant to mention that the *wedding* motif does not appear *at all* in the first two acts. The first time we hear it in the opera accords with the dramatic situation: in act III, in the moment when Vadar leaves Nersa in order to look at the wedding preparations [v. s. p. 221, played by the oboe, clarinet and horn]. Its next appearance is at the end of the act, supporting the exclamations addressed to Hareb, “*il nuovo padrone*” and accompanying the wedding celebrations of Init and Oceana [v. s. p. 269-280]. It is quietly introduced by clarinet, low clarinet and viola, in unison, above the protracted dominant chord of A major; the figure is gradually assembled in chords, is intensively repeated, leading towards its full statement in D major. From this moment on, the motif takes over the main thematic material in the orchestral texture and continues to recur until the opera ends; this part of the music is transferred literally to form part of overture [v. s. p. 271-276 and p. 6-8, 17-18].

As was mentioned earlier, Hareb’s motif appears independently throughout the opera; at times *next* to the *wedding* motif [overture, v. s. p. 5 b. 4; p. 270 b. 10-11] and often interacting with other motifs, for example with Vadar’s [v. s. p. 274 b. 12-14]. In its early appearances, the motif gets developed gradually; its initial presentations can be distinguished primarily through its distinctive rhythm, during the scene in act I in which Ers talks to Nersa, while Hareb himself is nowhere to be seen yet. We hear a fragmentary ‘rhythmic cell’ which perceptibly acquires the melodic shape of the motif (both of n. 3 and 3a) [v. s. p. 45 b. 16; p. 46 b. 9, p. 47 b. 1-4]. The attention Smareglia gives to Hareb’s motif in the opera, and its striking resemblance to the *wedding* motif can be explained by the fact that, although Hareb is depicted as ‘weak-witted’ in act I, he gains our sympathy when he becomes the victim of the sirens’ enchantment song, at the end of act II. The drama turns to his advantage at the very end of the opera, when he gains back his sanity and inherits all of his brother’s fortune. Hareb has much to celebrate, which possibly explains why from this moment on his theme receives rhythmic treatment similar to the *wedding* theme itself.

Example V D:

[3]



[3] or [3a]



To the leading roles of the opera, the young **Nersa** and the God of the sea **Init**, the composer does not award real leitmotifs. Instead, for each of them he creates the most elegant *ariosos*, through which they express their passion. Within their *ariosos*, however, we can recognise two themes which are associated only with Nersa's character [n. 7], and one with Init's feelings [n. 2]. To some extent these themes act as reminiscence themes: they reappear several times in the course of the opera, and accompany the two characters and their particular mood. We notice that unlike the other already mentioned motifs, they are *rarely* employed in the orchestral developments and do not undergo *genuine* transformation, except perhaps once, which will be discussed shortly. Nersa's theme is a short, simple song which reflects her particularly melancholy mood as she tells us of her dream:



She sings this melody in each of the three acts, accompanied by the words “Ti desidero nel aurora”. It is notable that it is first heard off-stage, isolating the scene for a moment and completely seizing our attention. It follows the harvest scene in act I, and is detached by *trattenuto*, the orchestral texture being transparent, while the solo oboe follows Nersa's melody [v. s. p. 28/5/2– 4]. In the rest of the drama the theme behaves like the melody of a dream that haunts her. For example, it reappears at the moment when Init wakes her up, capturing her half awake, by surprise (act II); its appearance is identical to act I [it follows the change of rhythm from 4/4 to 6/8, moderato rhythm, Bflat minor v. s. p. 150/2/2]. The theme gains more dramatic and musical impact in act III, which is set in Vadar's palace, prior to their wedding. In the short prelude, Nersa's theme alternates with the theme of Vadar; the prelude's tempo is set in a particularly slow tempo, and with very little orchestral accompaniment [v. s. p. 215/2/1-3]. The only other time the theme is sung by Nersa is at the beginning of act III, when she remains alone at last, and pours out her sad feelings. In order to evoke Nersa's inner conflict the composer gradually breaks up her vocal line and then also the orchestral accompaniment.

Another elegant, melancholic theme which can only be associated with Nersa, is the melody which she sings while leaving the sea world at the end of act II [see **Thematic guide**, n. 12]. Before that, this theme was employed several times in the prelude to act two, the ‘sea nocturne’, evoking the moonlit sea shore, and Nersa asleep on it. A similar long, serpentine meditative melody is the main theme in the ‘sea nocturne’ [theme 12a]. The only other time it appears in the story is at the moment when Init first sees Nersa, half way through act II. Both themes are always played by the woodwinds (together or solo), and are usually accompanied by a refined, transparent orchestral texture. Rather than enhancing the dramatic effect, the

composer employs these themes to deepen the established poetic mood.

As for the God of the sea, Init, Smareglia employs a theme which underlines the moment of his falling in love [n. 2]:



The melody usually unfolds into an aria, just as is the case when we first hear it, half way through act II. In this scene, Init's ecstatic *cantabile* is sustained by the chorus of 'sea geniuses' (geni del mare), who name the young girl Oceana. The scene of their falling in love is further enhanced when Init's love theme also becomes a part of Nersa's *arioso*.

There are two characteristic parts in this theme to be noted. On some occasions, as in act III, in the scene in which Vadar is shocked by finding the two lovers embracing, the composer uses and transforms these fragments separately. The first section of the theme is completely modified. Smareglia expresses the dramatic tension in the music at this point in the story by dropping Vadar's theme, and by using a distorted version of Init's theme, modifying its intervallic structure, tonality, accompaniment and rhythm [see "Init theme distorted" on p. 158. Cf. also v. s. p. 235 b. 3-8 and 236 b. 1-4]

There is one more musical idea which we hear several times in the opera's overture [n. 11]



The reason why, afterwards, the *love* theme never appears again in full until the last scene of the opera, is because it represents the fulfillment of the love between Init and Nersa, which flowers only in act III. It is only possible to identify fragments of it interwoven in the musical texture half way through the second act, for example in the scene of Nersa's and Init's first encounter [v. s. p. 154 b. 3, 6]. Besides the examples already mentioned (arias or *ariosos* developed out of Init's theme, Nersa's theme or the 'love' theme itself), the score of *Oceana* displays perhaps some of the most inspired vocal writing of the composer. The end of the opera provides a fine illustration: Smareglia gradually builds a duet, a trio, leading into a complex *quintetto* in which Nersa and Init's *cantabile* mixes with the conversational singing of Uls, Ers and Vadar [v. s. p. 251-254]. The ardent passion of the two lovers is constantly intensified in

their vocal parts. The act comes to an end with the chorus celebrating their wedding, accompanied by the music from the overture [v. s. p. 275-277; p. 281 - 288].



Oceana



Uls

Illustration 15: Oceana and Uls, stage design from 1903.

V. 5 Conclusion

One of the reasons why atmospheric painting is all-pervasive in the opera is the way in which Smareglia interprets the story. We have seen him creating the orchestral pictures, such as the sea nocturne or the dance of the waves. Furthermore, the composer achieves musical coherence and continuity by creating a series of musical characters in the drama. It can be said that Smareglia uses the leitmotif technique in a manner akin to that of Wagner: they are used throughout the music, are developed and transformed, and they always project the dramatic situation. What is new in this opera is the almost tangibly picturesque text which Smareglia had to start with: the nature of its subject, its story line, the characters, and the ambience in which they move had very little that was dramatic in the common understanding of the term. Furthermore, the composer's dramatic intentions were not like those of his younger colleague Puccini for example; Smareglia's instinct for the theatre was not as practical. For him the centre of the drama was not so much on stage as in the orchestra, even more so since his main tool was his imagination.

V. 6 The reception of *Oceana*

Oceana è una commedia fantastica e mira a dar motivo a grandi scene decorative di mitologia e a grandi quadri di musica sinfonica. [Benco in a letter to Boccardi]

[*Oceana* is a fantastic comedy; it aims to inspire vast decorative scenes of mythology as well as vast pictures of symphonic music.]

How did the critics and the spectators react to such an anti-theatrical opera? In many ways the critical reception of *Oceana*'s premiere is one of the reasons for which the opera remained vividly remembered in the history of La Scala. The controversy generated at its first staging confirmed that the opera was of a new and complex nature. From the numerous reviews we learn that the theatre was crowded and included such eminent personalities as D'Annunzio, Franchetti, Puccini, Giordano, Leoncavallo and Cilea. The performance was considered "ideal", earning ovations for Toscanini's interpretation.⁶⁵ What was memorable about *Oceana* were the strong debates it provoked at the time; it was both loved and condemned outright. The opera took the spectators by surprise to such an extent that the audience was divided into two disparate camps - *pro* and *contra Oceana*; into "*oceanisti*" and "*non-oceanisti*", as D'Annunzio described it.⁶⁶ The echo of the event went as far as Trieste, where one of the city's journals devoted a whole page to satirical jokes about the opera and the sea world it evoked.⁶⁷ One author even wrote an "ode" of a rather dubious character about it.⁶⁸

The debate, which continued for days, concentrated on those who admired the opera's novelties as opposed to those who adhered to more traditional views and were shocked by *Oceana*'s anti-theatrical and anti-realistic appeal. This part of the audience saw Benco's and Smareglia's intentions as ineffectual, and in fact, ended up applauding most the overture and what Leoncavallo called the "*quintetto all'italiana*" placed at the end of act III. These were considered the two most communicative, and in the case of the quintet, conventional, moments of the work. One critic claimed that if Smareglia had only included a *romanza* for tenor, and a *duetto d'amore*, he would have had such a success! For the rest of the performance the audiences expressed their aversion and boredom by the kind of disturbances for which La Scala already had some reputation: lots of hissing or chatting during the production, the kind of behaviour which, as Boldrini put it, was "humiliating" to witness. An overview of the whole evening is given in Mario Smareglia's book.

⁶⁵ The information and the excerpts from several of the articles can be found in Barblan, *Toscanini e la Scala*.

⁶⁶ D'Annunzio's comment is quoted in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 361.

⁶⁷ The copy of the article found in the Civico Museo Teatrale "C. Schmidl" is incomplete; the page mentioned is entitled "*Guerin Meschino*"; however these details have not been sufficient to identify the author or the date of the article.

⁶⁸ The Ode to *Oceana* was written in Trieste in 1902, and was signed by an author by the name Ninia. Its text consists of fifteen strophes of four *senari* each, linked with rhyme endings. "S'inalzi, si canti/ L'antico Peana/ Al prode Istriano / Autor d'Oceana. Fu un parto sublime / Del grande maestro / in essa profuse / Con lena il suo estro...".

More perceptive members of the press interpreted the opera's lack of "theatrical effectiveness" in a different way. They tactfully explained that *Oceana* was not the kind of work "which can be appreciated in all its beauty at a first hearing".⁶⁹ The critics ended up praising *Oceana*'s picturesque elements, and found new terminology in order to describe the work: *Oceana* was seen as an opera of an "unusual structure", a "lyrical poem" (*poema lirico*, Sachetti), a "continuous descriptive symphony" (*continua sinfonia descrittiva*, Pozza) or as a "fairy-tale of pure lyrical imagination" (*fiaba di pura immaginazione lirica*, Pozza).

What remains particularly significant is the supporters' recognition that Benco and Smareglia wanted to create "their own musical theatre", in which *music* was clearly predominant or the "primary element". The composer's spirit was best captured in the comment by Cameroni, the critic who fervently defended Smareglia at the time:

Sinfonista e contrappuntista consumato – nessuno osò negarlo nemmeno ieri sera – signore come nessuno dei più eccellenti contemporanei della tavolozza orchestrale... egli circonfonde i suoi sogni... con un senso di contemplazione più che di commozione con un ritmo più di poema che di dramma. [Cameroni, in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 222]

[Devoted symphonist and polyphonist - nobody dared to deny it yesterday evening either – master of the orchestral palette as no other of his contemporaries ... he encompasses his dreams... more with a sense of contemplation than of sentiment, more with the rhythm of a poem rather than of a drama.]

The impact which *Oceana* had in La Scala's history was confirmed again some forty years ago. In 1954, the Milanese journal *Domenica del Corriere* published the illustrations of eight works whose premieres, according to the illustrator, were remembered as the most notable events for the Italian operatic theatre. The period in consideration were the years between 1899 and 1924, and the publication included the illustrations of Boito's *Nerone* (Milan, La Scala, 1924), Puccini's *Tosca* (Rome, Teatro Costanzi, 1900), *Madama Butterfly* (Milan, La Scala 1904), Franchetti's *Germania* (Milan, La Scala 1902) and Smareglia's *Oceana*.⁷⁰ The author of the article accompanied these illustrations with the following comment: "these illustrations are documents from an era for which more than one of our readers will feel nostalgic".⁷¹

⁶⁹ "*Oceana* non è un lavoro che si faccia apprezzare in tutta la sua bellezza ad una prima audizione...", in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 232.

⁷⁰ The remaining three works were the two ballets *Ballo Amor* and *Rosa d'Amor*, both on music by Romualdo Marenco and choreography by Luigi Manzotti.

⁷¹ "...Illustrazioni che costituiscono documenti di un'epoca di cui più di uno dei nostri lettori proverà nostalgia", from "Le grandi premières all'opera tavole di Achille Beltrame" by Vincenzo Gibelli in *Domenica del Corriere*, 8 December 1957.

CHAPTER VI

ABISSO - THE EXPLOSION OF THE SENSES

Abisso, dramma lirico in 3 acts.

Milan, Teatro alla Scala, 10 February 1914.

[La musica colma] l'abisso tra il disagio della realtà presente e l'irraggiungibilità immediata di ciò che manca alla vita nostra come se le mancasse il respiro. [Benco, "Musica e nostalgia", in *Scritti musicali*, p. 124]

[Music fills the abyss between the discomfort of present reality and the impossibility of obtaining what is lacking in our life, as if it lacked breath.]

VI. I Introduction

For Smareglia, *Abisso* meant his return to Milan's leading opera house after eleven years. Its premiere, unlike the premiere of *Oceana* in 1903, did not provoke general controversy, but was widely thought to be a resounding success. The audience of La Scala applauded the opera with such enthusiasm that more than one critic wondered if such warmth also marked appreciation for the overall achievements of the composer.¹ It is useful to remember that the decade preceding *Abisso* (1904 - 1914) saw a drastic decline in the number of new operas staged at La Scala, in comparison to the previous ten-year period. Furthermore, the change was obvious not only in the smaller number of operas composed but in the peculiar nature of these works: out of fourteen operas written during that time by the composers of the "young Italian school", four were based on subjects by D'Annunzio, another four were *dannunzian* in style, and one was by Puccini.²

¹ See for example, the opinion of the Turinese music critic, Michele Lessona, in *La Stampa*, 11 [?] February 1914. Lessona's article has been partially quoted in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 279-280.

² See Appendix C, Time line 3 and 4. Except for Mancinelli all the other composers belong to "la giovane scuola". The operas based on D'Annunzio's subjects were: *La figlia di Iorio* (Franchetti 1906), *Paolo e Francesca* (Mancinelli 1907), *Parisina* (1913) and *Francesca da Rimini* (Zandonai 1914); *dannunzian* in style were: *Gloria* (Cilea 1907), *Isabeau* (Mascagni 1911), *Conchita* (Zandonai 1911), *Abisso* (Smareglia 1914). The time line includes other two dannunzian subjects which were at the time set to music by Pizzetti (*Fedra* and *La Pisanella*, the second being the poet's comedy, for which Pizzetti wrote incidental music). The lesser known operas by Giordano (such as *Marcella* 1907, and *Mese Mariano* 1910) and by Leoncavallo (*Zingari* 1912) were not included in the present discussion.

Abisso was one of these unusual operas. As was the case with *Oceana* and *Falena*, *Abisso* was also accompanied by numerous comments at the time of its premiere. It may be that Smareglia continued to provoke curiosity among the audience and the critics for two main reasons. Firstly, *Abisso* confirmed that the composer still believed in and insisted on collaborating with Benco. Secondly, the composer was much admired because of his ability to continue dictating his music in spite of the blindness which struck him in the midst of his career. The fact that Smareglia, for the third time in his career, was presenting an opera based on ‘a Benco text’, particularly caught the attention of the reviewers. Their teamwork was widely recognised by the critics, in some cases to such an extent that it misled Paolo Isotta into believing that *Abisso* is a “camouflaged transcription of *Falena*”.³ Although this time, in contrast to *Falena*, Benco fashioned a combative, violent *male* character, and placed the emphasis more on the sensual elements of the plot rather than on the destructive forces of the human mind, the two libretti were both closely linked with the atmosphere and the literary style of Decadence.

Since *Abisso* was the last opera of the Benco – Smareglia collaboration, and since it can be said that the collaboration with Benco had largely defined Smareglia’s last and most mature compositional phase, it seems logical to devote the opening section of this Chapter to the relationship between the two artists. So far this subject has been only partially addressed. The sections which will follow are largely based on a discussion of the various critical reviews of the opera. These articles, written between 1914 and 1979, were published in numerous newspapers and journals, and provide an important source of information about the opera’s genesis and reception. More significantly, their authors were particularly perceptive in singling out what seem to be the most characteristic features of the opera. It is argued here that these comments provide a good basis for further discussion and research into topics such as the controversial nature of the plot, the eroticism in the subject, and the densest fusion of symphonism with “*canto*” the composer ever achieved.

Firstly, it is helpful to turn briefly to Smareglia’s life in the years which separate *Oceana* (1903) and *Abisso* (1914). The events which followed the exciting premiere of *Oceana* have been, to some extent, described in Chapter II of this thesis. It is important to remember that, like his audience, Smareglia felt a bit lost after *Oceana* and to some extent intimidated by the response to the opera, which was to be remembered by Benco as an “*opera di battaglia*”. Although the attention he gained with *Oceana* contributed to his popularity, immediately afterwards the composer left Milan, spending about two years in Venice (from 1903-1905). The circumstances in which Smareglia lived at the time were extremely difficult, not only because of the physical handicap of his blindness, but because of financial hardship: this explains why

³ “[T]rascrizione mascherata della *Falena*”, by Isotta, in *Il Giornale degli Spettacoli*, 6 February 1979.

he lived for long periods of time with his friends, such as Achille Tamburlini, a noted Venetian sculptor of the time.⁴ Smareglia however, kept on working and meeting other artists; the names we encounter in his biographies are those of Wolf-Ferrari, Leoncavallo, Strauss, Saint-Saëns and Gian Francesco Malipiero. At that time he was occupied with several projects, which included the revision of his previous operas (of *Falena* in particular), the beginning of a new one, and the possibility of establishing a publishing company, since the composer was again without one.⁵

From available letters and biographies we can discern that Smareglia was thinking through several possible ideas for a new work. He thought of writing a symphonic poem after Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, and also contemplated new subjects for an opera. The ideas included Maeterlinck's tale *Ariane et Barbe-blue*⁶ and Benco's *La morte dell'usignolo*. The latter text, originally dating from 1901, was the project which Smareglia had started to work on before composing *Oceana*, but he had only completed its first act.⁷ It still remains unclear why Smareglia's reaction to these stories was unfavourable, in particular since some elements of these two texts, as will soon be explained, can be recognised in the subject of *Abisso*. The fact is that nearly four years were to go by before the composer found a new subject. In the meantime, to divert his mind, he was accompanied by Piero Manzutto and Gaudenzio dalla Zonca, two Triestine friends, on a visit to his friends in Dresden and Vienna.⁸ Although what Smareglia hoped for was to renew his old acquaintances, what he surely had not imagined was meeting Ernst von Schuch in the midst of the conductor's final rehearsals of Strauss's latest opera, *Salome*. Without any expectation of attending it, but thanks to Schuch's

⁴ For Achille Tamburlini see Personalia, Appendix A.

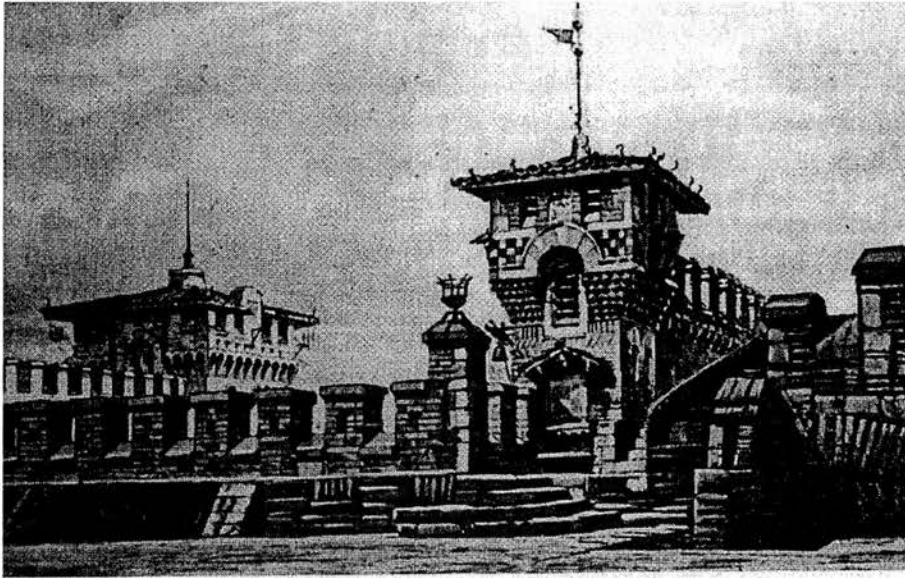
⁵ We learn from Ariberto Smareglia's biography as well as from the composer himself, that the so called "editore Mariani", who was interested in Smareglia's next opera on Benco's text, *La morte dell'usignolo*, was no longer in business; see Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, p. 62. It appears, from a letter written by the composer, that even Siegfried Wagner was to be involved in it (see letter n. 12 in Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, pp. 30-31). The project failed to materialise, and so did the attempt to set up a contract with Ricordi, which was mediated by Luigi Illica (see letter n. 15, *ibid.*).

⁶ Around this time the composer, along with Benco, must have also tried to collaborate with D'Annunzio and his "poetic theatre" intended to be built in Albano, near Rome. Cf. Chapter I. 2. Smareglia's interest in Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* dates back to 1894, during the time Smareglia spent in Dignano in Istria. Illica however, inspired by the local atmosphere, insisted that they write a *verismo* opera; the result was *Nozze istriane* (Trieste 1895). Maeterlinck's tale *Ariane et Barbe-blue* is first mentioned in Benco's letter from 1900 (see Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 22). To a certain extent, in *Abisso* the two female characters behave similarly to the wives of Bluebird: both Gisca and Mariela become attracted to their 'torturer', giving up their freedom.

⁷ The completed first act was lost in Milan during the First World War. The circumstances which made Smareglia abandon the composition of this opera are unclear. According to Ariberto Smareglia, the composer was strongly attracted by the libretto. From Ariberto's biography it seems that some of the musical ideas were used in *Abisso*'s "scene of the priest". The manuscript of *La morte dell'usignolo* remains in private possession of the Trieste musicologist and critic, Gianni Gori.

⁸ Hans Richter and Ernst von Schuch were both involved in conducting Smareglia's earlier operas. Richter conducted the operas *Der Vasall von Szigeth* (in 1889) and *Cornelius Schut* (in 1894) in Vienna, while Ernst von Schuch conducted the premiere of *Cornelius Schut* in Dresden in 1893. For more information about Smareglia's encounter and friendship with the two artists see Chapter II. 2. For more on Zonca and Manzutto, see Personalia, Appendix A.

invitation, Smareglia was able to hear the performance of one of the touchstones in the history of opera. Not only did the composer attend the premiere of *Salome*, but he was so impressed that he went to hear it a second time; each time he sent a postcard about his impressions to Boito.⁹ On several occasions in the course of this thesis it has been mentioned that Smareglia and Strauss had met at different times. Smareglia recalled these encounters in a short essay about the composer in which he concluded that, “perhaps Strauss is the most important personality in the evolution of modern music”.¹⁰ It is likely that hearing Strauss’s music had an impact on Smareglia’s own future opera; the two operas in fact attracted some similar criticism, for example in being described as having too great a resemblance to ‘scenic symphonies’. More interestingly, however, *Salome*’s impact can be sensed in the libretto written for the opera by Benco.



“*Abisso*” - Scena atto III. Teatro alla Scala

Illustration 16: *Abisso*, stage setting of act III, from Mario Smareglia’s book

⁹ Cf. Chapter II. 2. See Benco, *Ricordi*, pp. 122-123, also Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, p. 69. Boito’s opinion of *Salome*, however, would prove to be quite different, see Carner, *Puccini*, p. 42.

¹⁰ “Riccardo Strauss ... rappresenta la personalità tipica forse più importante dell’evoluzione musicale moderna...”, from Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 318.

VI. 2 Synopsis

Characters:

Anselmo - old shepherd

Gisca and Mariela - his granddaughters

Hanno - German baron

Vito - his esquire

Un frate - priest

German warriors, Lombard commoners and citizens

The plot takes place in Lombardy in Italy, between 1175- 1176.

Act I: A hut in the Apennines

It is a late winter's night in wartime. While the old shepherd Anselmo warms himself at the fireplace, his two granddaughters, Mariela and Gisca, listen through the door to the sounds that are mysteriously evoked by the night. They feel lonely, as it has been a long time since someone visited them. They nostalgically recall the day before, when a cavalcade passed by their house without stopping. Anselmo joins their conversation, warning them about an unknown night 'wanderer', whose spirit affects those who listen to it. The girls however, continue to dream of someone who will fall in love with them some day.

Suddenly Gisca screams, hearing a galloping sound from outside. Their enemy, the German baron Hanno, his esquire Vito and other soldiers, break into the cottage. They are searching for shelter overnight and Hanno rudely demands it from Anselmo. Hanno's brutal behaviour provokes an impetuous reaction from Gisca, which only gets his blood up the more. Her rebellious character attracts him and he determines to take her away with him the next day. Mariela becomes jealous of her sister, wishing that the handsome enemy had chosen her instead. She escorts the visitors to their shelter and stables their horses in a barn, while Gisca seeks comfort in her grandfather's arms. When Hanno and Mariela return to the cottage, Hanno comments upon Mariela's seductive behaviour and humiliates her by offering her to Vito. He chooses Gisca for himself. Although hesitant at first, Vito approaches Mariela. Soon both couples abandon the cottage, leaving the old Anselmo alone and frightened.

Act II: A castle in a village of Lombardy

It is a mid-April night. *Zufolio*, a patriotic tune, is heard coming from the street below, it is either played by a flute or sung by a Lombard.¹¹ Although provocative, the song initially does not affect Hanno: he is joyful, and flirts with his lover's sister, Mariela. Continuous repetitions of this tune gradually provoke Hanno to respond to the provocation by singing passionately. He is drunk and insults Vito about his gentle behaviour with women. Feeling everyone's disapproval of his vulgar behaviour and already tired of Gisca, he turns to Mariela, who still fancies him. Hanno and Mariela continue to flirt, provoking Gisca's and Vito's jealousy. They soon abandon the castle together, leaving the broken hearted Gisca alone.

In her desperate distress, Gisca sees an apparition of a priest. He 'visits' Gisca's 'soul', torturing her conscience for having betrayed the country by conniving with the enemy. In an extended dialogue, the priest blames her for leading a sinful life. He suggests that, instead, she ought to take the role of Judith, the heroine who rescued her people by seducing and then killing the enemy in his sleep. She ought to save her country by killing the baron. Gisca, at first horrified by the idea, gradually surrenders: she is "*lombarda*", and cannot bear the weight of the priest's words. The episode ends in an ecstatic vision of a Lombard victory. As the apparition of the priest vanishes, Gisca hears Mariela and Hanno returning, but when the opportunity arises to kill Hanno, Gisca's courage fails her. Hanno is shocked and wants to punish her, but Mariela intervenes and saves her sister's life.

Meanwhile the castle is surrounded by the Lombards, who are now in revolt. Finally Hanno is distracted from flirting with Mariela and joins the battle. In the violent fighting Vito loses his life, while the two sisters, exhausted and terrified, confront one another. Mariela declares her eternal love for Hanno, which embitters Gisca and provokes her to scream dementedly.

Act III

It is a clear morning in May. Mariela and Hanno are barricaded in the castle, imprisoned by the Lombards. Mariela is still cheerful in Hanno's company, but the baron is irritable, thinking

¹¹ *Zufolio* is a term used by Benco. The expression derives from the word *zuffolo*, a small flute or a whistle. In the opera it is a patriotic tune, either played on *zuffolo* [like a military flute], or sung. Its text bears strong patriotic connotations. When the opera was first staged it included one more repetition of the patriotic tune, sung off stage, which Benco and the conductor Tulio Serafin found ineffective. According to Benco, there was a short dispute about removing it from the score, the idea which the composer initially refused despite the pleading of both librettist and conductor. It was finally removed when Smareglia changed the opera's ending; this was done by the time of *Abisso*'s second staging, which took place in Trieste in 1926.

only of how to escape. While they comfort each other, the church bells announce the Lombard victory at Legnano. Hanno tries to escape by using the bell-ringer's rope, but suddenly meets Gisca who is dementedly wandering around the castle. Having again met her beloved, she becomes agitated, dragging him closer to the edge of the battlement. Mariela attempts to help Hanno and escape with him but Gisca grabs her and doesn't let her go. Suddenly, she pushes Mariela off the wall and into the abyss. In his attempt to escape, Hanno is mortally wounded. Gisca remains with him as he dies and reveals that she is finally at peace.¹²

¹² This is the second version of the opera's ending, which Benco had written on Smareglia's insistence. The revision was made some time after the First World War and was complete by 1921. See also Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 251.

VI.3 The Benco – Smareglia collaboration

Looking back at the collaboration between Smareglia and Benco it must be said that their partnership was not as simple as may at first appear. In the course of this thesis we have learnt about their working relationship, in particular in the chapters which examined *Falena* and *Oceana*, but these showed only some of its aspects. The style of the opera which followed, *Abisso*, confirms that the two artists created works of unusual and highly original character in early 20th-century Italian opera. Nevertheless, it is hard to see *how* the librettist and the composer collaborated. The surviving documentation relating to the creation of the three operas is restricted to the sources discussed in Chapter II. As was explained, there seems to be astonishingly little correspondence between the two artists which has been published.¹³ The existence of many *unpublished* letters reveals quite a different picture from the one we get from the published collection. This collection of Smareglia's letters (in which Benco is Smareglia's most frequent correspondent) is confined to essential communication, rarely discussing the work itself. There are for example, a few letters in which the librettist gets involved in composing the music, and changes some of the verses of *Falena* upon Smareglia's request; on the basis of these letters it is possible to get more of a sample of the discussions between Benco and Smareglia concerning their work.¹⁴ On some occasions letters contain the kind of information which suggests that, most certainly, there had been more discussion between the two artists while working together. For example, a couple of passing comments in a letter from 1911, upon the completion of *Abisso*, imply more than they say:

L'*Abisso* è quello che è, e credo che sia abbastanza interessante, anche se la sua architettura si discosta dal solito. [Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 56]

[*Abisso* is what it is. I think it is quite interesting, although its structure is different from the usual.]

In another letter, written during the same month, Benco mentions the first edition of the text: "The libretto has arrived yesterday; the edition is very proper".¹⁵ Curiously, no letters appear to

¹³ This discussion is primarily based on the study and on the overall impression one gets from the published part of Smareglia's correspondence. However, further investigation conducted in several of the archives in Trieste (during my research trip in October 2000) has revealed quite an astonishing number of letters (written mostly by Smareglia) which have not been generally known. Some of these letters have been transcribed and discussed in this thesis. These letters are included in Appendix B. Cf. discussion in Chapter II. 1. i.

¹⁴ The letters in question were written much later, around the time Smareglia was working on *Oceana*. See also Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, pp. 32-33, 69-72. For the discussion of the changes which involved *Falena*, see Chapter IV. 4. ii.

¹⁵ "Il libretto è arrivato ieri; l'edizione è molto decorosa", see Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, pp. 56-58, 84-85. More detailed discussion of the published part of the composer's correspondence is in Chapter II. 1.i.

have been exchanged immediately following this opera's premiere. And yet the major changes in their collaboration regard the end of *Abisso*.

One would expect Benco's memoirs, *Ricordi di Antonio Smareglia*, to provide an eye witness account of their collaboration. However, more than anything, this book provides us with an insight into the turbulent itinerary of Smareglia's life, remaining the most valuable summary of their friendship, and only a background commentary on their partnership. Although we do not get a detailed view of practical issues such as the dramatic flow, or the depiction of the characters in the opera, Benco reflected on several occasions on how he felt about writing the texts of *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso*. More importantly, he gave us an account of the role he played as Smareglia's librettist, choosing the ideas he felt the composer would find most stimulating, and telling us how Smareglia went to work in approaching a new operatic text. Benco's thoughts are the only testimony we have about the composer.

One must stress that Smareglia's blindness gradually became more difficult to bear, and that, to a certain extent, his physical dependency also affected his professional life. His friendships from previous years, including his Triestine friends Manzutto, Zampieri, Bartoli, Pierobon and of course Benco, became more solid and helpful; in the case of Benco, it also meant the composer's complete reliance on their future collaboration. We learn, from Benco's *Ricordi*, that Smareglia, following their collaboration on *Oceana*, did not even want to think about working with another librettist: "he became attached to me as to a travelling companion".¹⁶ Considering this testimony, as well as the fact that the three operas were composed one after another, it may seem surprising to discover that Benco was reluctant to write them in the first place.

Benco and Smareglia met each other quite by accident when introduced by a mutual friend, the journalist Gian Giacomo Manzutto, at the time when Smareglia was contemplating a new libretto after the success of his opera *Nozze istriane*.¹⁷ As was mentioned in Chapter IV, the opportunity to write an opera text for Smareglia seemed to Benco most intriguing. From the very beginning, when approaching the task, he concentrated on creating a text with 'musical situations' which, in his opinion, would most inspire the imagination of the composer. As a result, *Falena* was considered unusual and undramatic, and was sharply criticised by most of the press following its premiere in Venice in 1897. It is likely that this lack of understanding shown for his and Smareglia's work affected Benco's confidence. Although it prompted him to defend the concept of his work in an article, "Le origini della *Falena*", he became considerably

¹⁶ The full quotation is as follows: "Smareglia non ne aveva voluto nemmeno sentir parlare; si era attaccato a me come a un compagno di navigazione...", in Benco, *Ricordi*, pp. 128-129.

¹⁷ For more information on their encounter, see Chapter II. 2. v.

more hesitant about the idea of writing another libretto. He insisted that the composer should collaborate with “more famous, experienced and fortunate authors”.¹⁸ And yet, he could not let down such a close friend. In addition, Benco was flattered at being considered by Smareglia an “inventor of musical situations”, and came himself to believe it.

Their next project moved further in the direction initiated by *Falena*. The poet and the composer agreed that this time the opera would be a “fantastic comedy”, set mainly in the depths of the ocean, its atmosphere inspired by the marine paintings of Böcklin. As was the case with *Falena*, Smareglia left the undramatic text of *Oceana* as he found it, using the music to bring it to life in a manner closer to the orchestral suite or tone poem than to opera. On the basis of Benco’s memoirs, as well as of Smareglia’s achievement with this opera, it seems that this kind of libretto, the supply of what Benco called a “series of symphonic situations”, was most stimulating for the composer (Benco 1968: 52). In fact, the libretto of *Oceana* is often recognised to be, as Waterhouse called it, “a subject perfectly in key with his personality” (Waterhouse 1968: 57). We learn from Benco, however, that Smareglia “was thrilled and at the same time full of doubts and fears” about it.¹⁹ He was intimidated by the “vastness of the picture, and of the scenic and symphonic requirements”.²⁰ In truth, this was also the case with *Falena*: Benco recalled that Smareglia had “more than a few doubts” about the text because it was “too different from the kind of melodramas which he had composed until then, too distant from the rules and traditions of the theatre”.²¹

The idea that Smareglia felt a bit insecure about the text which he was setting to music is supported by the fact that, while still composing *Oceana*, and immediately afterwards, he had expressed a wish for a “less unusual libretto”. Perhaps this may explain why he was not interested in Benco’s suggestion of the “legend of Monte Tricorno” entitled *Zlatorog*, by the German writer Rudolf Baumbach.²² Another abandoned project was *La morte dell’usignolo*, the text of which was described as “immersed in a fabulous historical atmosphere and in a spiral of destructive sensuality”.²³ It remains unclear why this libretto never stimulated Smareglia’s

¹⁸ The full quotation is as follows: “... Per quanto da parte mia si insistesse perchè si procacciasse la collaborazione d’autori di me più noti, più esperti e più fortunati”, from Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 81.

¹⁹ “Smareglia ne fu infervorato e al tempo stesso pieno di dubbi e di timori”, *ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁰ “Vastità della tela, le esigenze sceniche e sinfoniche lo rendevano esitante a musicarlo...”, in Benco’s letter to the critic Boccardi, written before *Oceana*’s premiere.

²¹ “Tropo diversa dal genere di melodrammi che aveva animato di musica fino a quegli anni, troppo discosta dalle regole e dalle tradizioni del teatro”, *ibid.* pp. 51-52.

²² Rudolf Baumbach (Kranichfeld 1840 – Meiningen 1905) German poet associated with the term “Butzenscheibenpoesie”, a derogatory name for the type of late 19th-century poetry which manifested a “degenerate Romanticism”. The characteristics of it were, among others, addiction to historical (medieval themes), and crude psychology. See Henry and Mary Garland eds., 1986, *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, 2nd ed., p. 66.

²³ “Immerso in un’atmosfera storico-fiabesca e in una spirale di distruttiva sensualità”, in Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 24.

imagination enough, so that he abandoned composition after the first act. He still insisted that Benco provide him with a subject for his next opera.

With *Abisso*, the third and last opera of Benco and Smareglia, the collaboration between the two artists is more difficult to understand and explain. As revealed in the following paragraph, Benco was surprisingly reluctant to create another libretto for Smareglia:

Come già altre volte, erano stati i suoi amici di Trieste a insistere su me perché gli componessi un lavoro che egli potesse musicare. Io avevo resistito lungamente a queste sollecitazioni, perché mi dava tormento la coscienza di aver già pesato troppo sul destino del maestro con legarne l'ingegno a mie fantasie su le quali si era sfogata la contrarietà di tanta gente, pur non nascondendomi che le sue più insigni pagine di musica erano nate da quegli spunti fantastici. Pensavo che nell'assoluto bisogno in cui egli si trovava di un'affermazione indiscussa, di un successo senza riserve, senza restrizioni aprioristiche, tale da schiudergli largo orizzonte, da farlo vivere, da farlo considerare per quello che egli era, fosse consulto da parte sua scegliersi un melodramma d'autore accetto all'universale, riconosciuto per qualità di poeta e d'uomo di teatro. [Benco, *Ricordi*, pp. 128-9]

[As had been the case before, it was his friends from Trieste who insisted that I should write a work for him to compose. I had resisted these solicitations for a long time, because my conscience was tormenting me for having already weighed too heavily on the composer's destiny by tying his talent to my own fantasies. These fantasies had provoked the negative reaction of many people, even though it could not be denied that his most refined pages of music were inspired by those ideas derived from the fantastic. I thought that he absolutely needed an undisputed triumph, a success without reservations, without aprioristic limits, which would widen his horizon, give him life and let him be recognized for what he was. Given this necessity, for him it would perhaps have been helpful to choose a *melodramma* written by an author widely accepted, and recognised for his qualities as a poet and as a man of theatre.]

The sense of responsibility which emanates from Benco's testimony and which Benco felt in the development of Smareglia's career seems to foreshadow what was to happen with *Abisso*. The poet's subject this time seemed hardly suitable for Smareglia. There were, certainly, novelties about *Abisso*'s libretto, such as the historic background of the plot, but the fierce and furious drama evolving around the violent lives of its principal characters shares something with the "destructive sensuality" which Smareglia previously refused in *La morte dell'usignolo*. It seems that, on a certain level, with this libretto Benco had misjudged the composer's needs and his possible response to such a text, since it was precisely the violent eroticism and the characters' agitated psychological states of mind which Smareglia deliberately avoided in his music. As will be seen in the section on music, his interpretation

was different. Benco himself noted, some thirty five years later, that unlike Strauss, Smareglia was not the kind of artist who would be “tempted” by such brutal, erotic drama:

La perversità, il sadismo di una *Salomè* [sic] non lo avrebbero mai tentato, non avrebbero mai trovato in lui un'espressione musicale, erano fuori delle sue possibilità di concepimento quanto i passi fatali e sonnambolici di *Pelléas e Mélisande* nella armonica spira di simboli che li avvolge con angosciosa dolcezza. Egli non apparteneva a questo mondo intellettualmente e psicologicamente saturo di raffinate droghe: era un uomo sano e semplice, a cui non veniva in mente di far passare la musica attraverso il senso del peccato o attraverso le fluttuazioni dell'incertezza di esistere. [Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 125]

[The perversity, the sadism of a *Salomé* would never have tempted him, would never have found musical expression in him. To conceive these things was outside his capacities, as was with the fatal and dreamy atmosphere of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, with its harmonious whirl of symbols which envelops the characters in agonising sweetness. He did not belong to this world intellectually and psychologically saturated with refined drugs: he was a sane and unsophisticated man, who could not conceive of making music express the sense of sin or the fluctuations of the uncertainty of existence.]²⁴

The question which presents itself at this point is, if this was his belief, why did Benco write a libretto of that kind? The apparent contradiction does not necessarily mean that the librettist no longer understood the composer, or that he cared any less, or lost interest in collaborating with Smareglia. It seems reasonable to believe that once Benco agreed to write another libretto he carried it out, devoted it to his own literary taste and interests. What is conspicuous is that the libretto of *Abisso* completely reveals the influences on Benco: in *Abisso* there are clear elements of Wilde, D'Annunzio, Poe and Maeterlinck for example.²⁵ We could interpret Benco's gesture as an attempt to direct the composer towards the then fashionable literary style of Symbolism and Decadence.

Benco's *Abisso* can in many ways be recognised as his most typical libretto; the poet is once more preoccupied with the inner world of the characters. Again, we have a text which offers no contrasting dramatic effects: even the more aggressive parts of the plot, such as the scene of Hanno's breaking into the cottage, the sexual 'assault' (act I) or the episodes of battle (act II and III) occur as fragmentary evocative touches rather than violent and explosive uproar. Even though *Abisso* was the first of Benco's libretti which had 'real' people, the poet's characterisation is vague; in the course of the story we are not permitted to learn anything about

²⁴ The last sentence of the translation can also be found in Matteo Sansone 1992, "Antonio Smareglia", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. by S. Sadie, vol. 3, p. 418.

²⁵ This aspect will be discussed in sections 3 and 4 of this chapter.

Gisca's or Mariela's past. Throughout the plot the attitude of the two sisters is unconvincing, for example Mariela's immediate flirting with the enemy in act I. With respect to the historical background of the story, even though the plot is set during the famous Battle of Legnano, its period is somehow less important than the destiny of the protagonists. As Salvetti pointed out, Smareglia's *Abisso* "still shows greater difficulties in relation to Benco's text", the difficulties being in the way in which the composer dealt with what appear to be the main aspects of the text: symbolism, violence and eroticism were qualities which excited Benco's imagination more than Smareglia's (Salvetti 1996: 461).

Thinking further about Salvetti's comment raises another important question about whether the two artists ever discussed their work in progress? Did Smareglia ever try to avoid the difficulties in any way by asking for changes in the libretto? As far as *Abisso* is concerned, the available correspondence remains scanty. It is from Benco's *Ricordi* that we find out about the major change regarding *Abisso*'s final scene, for example. According to Benco, it seems that Smareglia hardly ever demanded any substantial changes in the versification or in the drama itself:

L'estremo riguardo che egli usava verso i suoi librettisti, non volendo mai riuscir loro importuno, gli impediva di chiedere la modificazione di un brano di scena o la sostituzione di qualche verso in modo che s'accordassero meglio con l'onda lirica da lui immaginata. Si faceva quasi un punto d'onore di musicare il testo com'era, e io non ricordo che egli mi chiedesse se non due o tre volte qualche verso di più per completare un periodo musicale in lui nato. Questo era bello di lui, ma con un po' d'importunità avrebbe ottenuto anche il meglio. [Benco, *Ricordi*, p. 79]

[The extreme respect with which he treated his librettists, not wanting ever to bother them, prevented him from asking for the modification of a scene or for the replacement of some lines, in order for them to fit in better with the flow of the music he imagined. For him it was almost a point of honour to set the text to music the way it was, and I cannot recall him asking me for extra lines in order to complete a musical idea already imagined, on more than two or three occasions. This was very fine of him, but with a bit more insistence, he would have achieved his best.]

Surprising words by Benco! His comment seems to indicate his readiness, if necessary, to rewrite his verses. However, there are reasons to believe that the poet's flexibility, in respect to his own texts, was questionable. There are a few letters, even within the published collection, which enable us to examine the "two or three instances" mentioned by Benco. More importantly, however, in the series of unpublished letters, we learn that Smareglia asks in detail for various modifications of both the *Falena* and *Abisso* libretti.²⁶ Although the composer may

²⁶ These letters are discussed in Chapter IV section IV. 4. ii. See Appendix B for the transcription of the original letters.

seem not so demanding of his librettist, in comparison with the rigorous practices of Verdi or Puccini for example, the unpublished documents reveal that there were numerous occasions on which he did ask for changes of a verse or an individual scene. For example, in the case of *Abisso*, there were moments in the libretto which Smareglia found to be expressed “too realistically”, so he asked Benco for a change: in fact, some of the words uttered by Mariela in act I, such as “Vorrei piacergli”, were omitted in the newer version of *Abisso*. More importantly, in the same letter, the composer points out to Benco the problems of the concluding scene of act II. As Smareglia put it, they ought to do something about the two sisters, who remain on stage during the scene of the battle, and yet have very little to say or to do; “in this way it is impossible to avoid their inactivity and awkward situation”.²⁷ On another occasion, the composer demands a different metric structure: complaining of the way in which Benco changed two lines, Smareglia insists on needing “two independent lines”, of which the second needs to be a “*settenario* with the accent on the second syllable”, in order to fit his music. In the same letter, he wonders whether the scene with the “*campanaro*” is necessary at all, since he utters only few words. Although Smareglia did not get what he wanted in all of these instances, this kind of information confirms the composer’s involvement in the modifications of the libretti.

Several letters in the published edition, written by Benco between 1903 and 1912, are particularly illuminating. Besides learning about the kind of modifications (of *Falena*), we are given an insight into what their discussions were like. Benco’s attitude, once Smareglia asked for an alteration, is interesting primarily because it varies. Although the details regarding the changes in question are mentioned in Chapter IV, it should be noted that, when providing new verses for the end of act III, the scene which leads to the finale of the opera, Benco appears *detached*, leaving the ultimate decision to the composer: “you do as you wish”.²⁸ Yet on another occasion, there is a different kind of response; the poet urged Smareglia to leave the text as it is: “there is no need to make Uberto more interesting”.²⁹ In another example of an answer given by Benco, the poet begins to get involved in the composition itself, suggesting the changes which Smareglia should make in regards to Stellio and Albina’s vocal part: “it is necessary to continue, and create a *cantilena* which, in its character, will be suitable both to the situations of both [Stellio] and [Albina].³⁰ This is the way to create a richer vocal effect”.³¹

²⁷ Letter n. 1251, see Appendix B.

²⁸ “Ma fa tu come credi”, see letter n. 13, in Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*. For more detailed discussions of the changes in questions, see Chapter IV.

²⁹ “Non c’è nessun bisogno di renderlo [Uberto] più interessante”, from letter n. 40, in Antonio Smareglia, *Lettere*, p. 69.

³⁰ The scene is placed half way through act I of *Falena*. Benco comments that the voices of Albina and Stellio sing “too short”. See letter n. 41, *ibid.* p. 71.

As mentioned earlier in this section, comments such as those found in Benco's letters enable us to get a partial insight into the teamwork of Benco and Smareglia. To judge from the letters they exchanged at the time, the revisions of operas went less smoothly than one might assume. The impression one gets is that Benco, although still taking the task of altering his libretto seriously, regarded this activity as one of secondary importance. His apparent detachment could be explained not by a lack of interest in what Smareglia wished to change, but by the minor significance he accorded to libretto writing in general. Benco's confidence in what he had already written, as well as his suggestions to the composer of what music should sound like, confirm the fact that although libretto writing was a marginal activity for the poet, he still believed his texts to be well written and capable of inspiring the composer. The exception to this was *Abisso*. With this opera Benco had to admit that Smareglia was right in choosing a different finale: to make it more dramatic, Smareglia suggested that Hanno should get wounded and die, whereas in Benco's original text he is captured by the Lombards and led away. Although in this opera Benco's text and Smareglia's music were not as closely integrated as in their previous achievements, at its premiere *Abisso* was still recognised to be "new, the highest document of the powerful talent, of the [musical] learning of Antonio Smareglia".³²

VI. 4 The libretto of *Abisso*

i. The choice of subject

The novelty in Benco's libretto for *Abisso* is his decision to choose a definite historical framework for it. This was not the case for his previous two texts for music, the imaginary "dramatic legend" of *Falena*, and the "fantastic comedy" of *Oceana*. To judge from two other libretti the poet had written during the same period for Malipiero, *Elen e Fuldano* (1907-8) and *Canossa* (1911-12), it seems that Benco's imagination was preoccupied with episodes from Italian history.³³ Besides the historical scenes, the plot of *Abisso* and *Canossa* involved violence, perverted sensuality and barbarity, which Salvetti summarised as "Mediaevalism pervaded by moral monstrosities which do not leave much space for lyricism".³⁴ It is important

³¹ "Bisogna continuare, affidare una cantilena in carattere con le posizioni all'una e all'altro... in modo di avere una impressione vocale più ricca...", from letter n. 41, *ibid.* p. 71.

³² "L'*Abisso* è nuovo altissimo documento dell'ingegno poderoso, della sapienza di Antonio Smareglia", G. B. Nappi, in *La Perseveranza*, 11 February 1914.

³³ J. C. Waterhouse mentions Benco's other two libretti, describing them as follows: "*Canossa*, come già *Elen e Fuldano*, ha un libretto ... privo di vero movimento drammatico e ambientato nell'epoca medievale", see Waterhouse, *La musica di Gian Francesco Malipiero*, p. 36.

³⁴ "Medioevo percorso da mostruosità morali, che non lasciano facile spazio a cantabilità liriche", in Salvetti, "Il novecento italiano", p. 465.

to note that Salvetti, in discussing Italian opera of the *novecento*, considered Benco's libretti as among those he called *dannunziani*.³⁵ Indeed, a closer look at the other works of the kind which were written in the first two decades of the twentieth century reveals a series of operas which were based on texts by D'Annunzio himself, or which involved a similar kind of subject.

It can be said that by 1906, the year in which Benco wrote the text of *Abisso*, Italian opera was enriched by the work of a new dramatic poet, Gabriele D'Annunzio. In that year his pastoral tragedy *La figlia di Iorio* was performed as a new opera by Franchetti, for which D'Annunzio personally prepared the libretto. During the same period the poet was also trying to collaborate with Puccini. Although Puccini was never satisfied with D'Annunzio's texts, commenting still in 1914 that "the poet is bad for the lyric theatre", all three of the proposed ideas which he discarded were destined to be set to music.³⁶ *Parisina*, *Rosa di Ciprio* (the future *La Pisanelle, ou la mort parfumée*) and *La crociata degli innocenti* (the future *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*) were chosen by Mascagni (Milan 1913), Pizzetti (Paris 1913) and Debussy (Paris 1911) respectively.³⁷ Besides these theatrical works by D'Annunzio, there were others which entered the operatic repertory in the same decade, such as Mancinelli's *Paolo e Francesca* (Bologna 1907), Zandonai's *Francesca da Rimini* (Milan 1914) and Pizzetti's *Fedra* (Milan 1915). Works of a similar character created at the time were Cilea's *Gloria* (Milan 1907) and Zandonai's *Conchita* (Milan 1911), the latter being another of the many subjects considered by Puccini when he was interested in Louÿs's novel *La femme et le pantin*.

Benco's *Abisso* is typical of the sort of dramas and novels mentioned. The decision to adopt a historical setting and the interest in psychological realism which can be recognised in *Abisso*, were to an extent influenced by his admiration for Maeterlinck and Ibsen.³⁸ A direct resemblance to certain elements of the plot can be found in other works D'Annunzio was writing at the time. Although it would be excessive to examine all of those texts fully, by pointing out some of the most distinctive features of their plots, of the setting or of the characters themselves, it is possible to recognise how Benco's texts fitted into this period. For example, the immoral relationships and sensual attitudes among the protagonists of *Abisso*

³⁵ Cf. with the mention in Chapter I.1.

³⁶ "Il Poeta porta male al teatro lirico", see Tedeschi, *D'Annunzio e la musica*, p. 53.

³⁷ It should be mentioned that *La Pisanelle, ou la mort parfumée* was a comedy (prologue and three acts) for which Pizzetti composed incidental music, while Debussy's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* was a *mistero* (prologue and five acts). Only *Parisina* was an opera.

³⁸ Although it is not certain whether Benco had read later works of Maeterlinck, the writer's plays written after 1900 (such as *Marie-Magdaleine*, *Monna Vanna*) reveal historical settings and acquired a greater moral interest. It should be noted that Benco absorbed Ibsen's writings, referring to him on numerous occasions in his articles (see his *Scritti di critica letteraria*). Furthermore, Benco's later novels (such as *Nell'atmosfera del sole*, 1914 and *Contemplazione del disordine* 1946, and the two plays (*L'Uomo malato* and *La bilancia*) deal to a great extent with moral issues. I owe the suggestion of the possible influences of Maeterlinck and Ibsen on *Abisso* to Dr. Paul Barnaby.

parallel the incestuous passion between Leonardo and his sister Biancamaria (in *La città morta*, 1896), between Ugo and his stepmother Stella (in *Parisina* 1913), Fedra and her stepson Ippollito (in *Fedra* 1909), and Aldo and his sister Isabella (in the novel *Forse che sì, forse che no*, 1910). In this last novel “the excitement of passions and states of mind ... desires and rancors explode passionately” and are manifested in its characters: there are two sisters whose destiny resembles that of Mariela and Gisca in *Abisso*, as Vana is led to suicide and Isabella becomes mad.³⁹ It is particularly important to stress that some of the above mentioned texts were written by D’Annunzio long after Benco’s creation of *Abisso*. Yet, D’Annunzio made such an impact on the literature of the time that Benco was clearly picking up on that style in his own writings.⁴⁰

ii. “How *Abisso* was created” (*Come è nato l’Abisso*)

In inventing the story of *Abisso* and linking it with a famous event from the past, Benco, unlike D’Annunzio, disregarded the pre-existing plays written by other Italian writers. Furthermore, he evoked the Middle Ages not because he was stimulated by archaic language, as was the case with D’Annunzio, for example in his *Francesca da Rimini* (1901), and *La Pisanella, ou la mort parfumée* (1913). In an interview two days prior to the premiere of *Abisso*, Benco had the opportunity to talk about his new libretto.⁴¹ His commentary on the occasion was by no means elaborate and defensive, as had been the case with *Falena*, or ambitious as in his introductory note to *Oceana*. With *Abisso*, Benco briefly described how the subject of the opera was created:

L’opera è nata dal fondersi di due temi drammatici: quello delle due sorelle travolte in una avventura di guerra e quello della Lega Lombarda, a noi suggerito dalla lettura di alcune sirventesi dell’epoca. Si può dire che il secondo atto si sia formato intorno ad una sirventese, che ne è quasi il tema dominante. Introdotta l’azione nell’epoca della Lega Lombarda, ne nacque la figura del frate, che è il personaggio tipico dell’atto secondo, il personaggio che viene a portare, tra la brutalità e l’erotismo dell’avventura di guerra, un soffio di spiritualità: violenta anch’essa, tutta medioevale, ma nondimeno elevatrice e purificatrice.

[The opera was created by fusing two dramatic themes: the theme of the two sisters caught in an adventure [incident] of war, and the theme of the Lombard League, suggested to us from the reading

³⁹ The quotation is as follows: “scatenamento di passioni e di stati d’animo, ... qui desideri e rancori esplodono apertamente”, from Mutterle, *Gabriele D’Annunzio*, p. 90.

⁴⁰ Although D’Annunzio’s own plagiarism was widely known and was subjected to the polemics of Enrico Thovez. For more information see John Woodhouse 1998, *Gabriele D’Annunzio: Defiant Archangel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴¹ From the article in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 8 February 1914, s. a. The excerpt from the same text has been quoted in other sources, such as in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 248-250.

of some sirventes of that era. It could be said that the second act is developed around one such sirvente, which is almost its dominant theme. Once the era of the Lombard League was introduced, the figure of the priest emerged spontaneously. He is the typical character in the second act, the character who carries a breath of spirituality amid the brutality and eroticism of this war incident. The action is violent too, wholly medieval, but nevertheless uplifting and purifying.]

Although Benco decided to create a new story around a famous historical event, the choice of the Battle of Legnano was for him not at all coincidental, as might at first appear. *Abisso* was, as he recalled in one of his letters, an opera “of much interest for the Lombards” (Smareglia 1974: 79). As revealed in his *Ricordi*, what he was hoping for at the time was to “touch the soul” of the audience, and help Smareglia regain his popularity in the city (Benco 1968: 129). After all, one critic writing on Benco’s earlier libretti commented that his stories lacked “national character”. *La Battaglia di Legnano* and the period of the *Lega Lombarda* were remembered as among the most important episodes of Italian history, and would, as was the case with Verdi’s opera of the same name, “stir every man with an Italian soul in his bosom”.⁴² However, it seems more sensible to remember Benco’s own nationalistic aspirations, in particular since his own hometown, Trieste, was at the time still under the Habsburg Empire. Being a fervent Italian patriot all his life, Benco had joined the *irredentisti*, and had been writing for the irredentists’ newspaper, *L’Indipendente* in Trieste. Still, to judge from the reviewers of the opera, the dramatic atmosphere of *Abisso* was hardly about the battle itself.

iii. *The nature of the plot*

Benco’s own way of fusing two themes within the plot, creating a drama about two young women whose innocence is, in a time of war, violated and then destroyed by the enemy, was at the time of the opera’s premiere found to be most original. By then, the critics expected his libretti to be different from any other operatic text of the time, and his imagination to invent “the strangest situations”.⁴³ In the case of *Abisso*, the correspondent of *Il Secolo* saw the element of patriotism created “outside the conventions of the historical drama”.⁴⁴ E. A. Berta, from *Il Corriere della Sera*, had, in fact, described Benco’s *Abisso* as a non-historical drama, set against a historical background where the historical elements were “decorative”. However,

⁴² The comment of Cammarano to Verdi is quoted from Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, p. 562.

⁴³ “L’arte poetica e la forbita fantasia di Silvio Benco ci abbiano addestrati alle più strane situazioni - il terzo atto dell’*Oceana* informi...”, from *Il Sole*, 11 February 1914, s. a. The same article is quoted in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 273-275, and signed N. N. [?].

⁴⁴ The full quotation is as follows: “fissato in libertà di fantasia, all’infuori dei segni convenzionali del dramma storico”, by [G. C.] in *Il Secolo*, 11 February 1914.

the plot itself was generally found to be insufficiently interesting, the scenes not persuasive and the characters not well defined by their author.

What some of the reviewers did find particularly curious was the *inner* drama of the protagonists, the “whirling drama of souls” as Italo Camillo Martelli called it. This drama was, for an anonymous critic of *Il Corriere della Sera*, “based on the sudden explosion of some strange passions in the two sisters”. Furthermore, the critic commented that *theatrically*, the course of the opera seemed “strange”, because the action evolved more through the narrative than through the events themselves. It was noticed that the actual Battle of Legnano was barely mentioned, while Benco had dedicated most attention to the sensual and emotional world of his characters. An anonymous writer for *Il Piccolo*, discussing the plot of *Abisso*, sensed that: “the libretto is not concerned with evoking the ambience, or with the *veristic* creation of historical events of the time; instead it is completely focused on condensing an atmosphere of dramatic poetry around the characters.”⁴⁵

It is relevant to notice that one reviewer remarked how “in some aspects *Abisso* could appear similar to *Falena*; there too, a soul is submerged by the senses”.⁴⁶ Benco first turned his imagination to the inner world of his characters very early in his career, at the time of writing his first text for music, *La Falena* (1895).⁴⁷ What is apparent at this point is that the descriptions of *Abisso*, such as “*una febbre esistenziale, una spirale d'angoscia*”, “*un'abisso d'inquietudine*”, “*schiavitù erotica*”, “*erotismo di Benco*”, could be used also when defining the story of *Falena*.⁴⁸ While in *Falena* the emphasis was placed on the destructive forces which agitate the human subconscious, *Abisso* openly deals with sensual violence and immoral behaviour. In other words, it is clear that Benco's last libretto brings back the type of themes which most strongly recall the artistic movement of literary Decadence.

iv. The element of eroticism in the drama

The implicit eroticism of the story was perhaps the side of *Abisso* which its audience felt most uneasy about. In one of the more recent reviews, written by Massimo Mila, the author saw the

⁴⁵ “...Il libretto non si preoccupa, nella evocazione dell'ambiente, o nelle ricostruzioni veristiche, dei fatti storici avvenuti in quei tempi, sibbene è tutto rivolto a condensare attorno ai personaggi un'atmosfera di poesia drammatica”, from *Il Piccolo di Trieste*, 21 January 1926. There are two articles, published on 21 and 22 January 1926 in this newspaper, prior to *Abisso*'s premiere in Trieste (26 January 1926), which depict the opera in similar terms.

⁴⁶ “Sotto certi aspetti *Abisso* potrebbe sembrare affine a *Falena*. Anche là un'anima resta sommersa dai sensi...”, from *Il Piccolo di Trieste*, 27 January 1926.

⁴⁷ Cf. Chapter IV. 3.

⁴⁸ The quotations are selected from the critical reviews of *Abisso* written by Gori in *Il Piccolo*, 5 February 1975 and Isotta, “Il fascino malato dell'*Abisso*”, in *Il Giornale degli Spettacoli*, 6 February 1979.

subject of *Abisso* as “completely enclosed within the boundaries of erotic lust”.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Mila regretted that Benco’s libretti were “of a completely literary extraction, written in *dannunzian* language so dated as to touch upon the absurdity of *kitsch*, ... they are abstract dramatic hypotheses, which do not have roots in any reality of conscience or custom”.⁵⁰ Since in *Abisso* there is an echo of the sensuous worlds of D’Annunzio and Wilde for example, it appears obvious that Benco was very aware of the currently fashionable subjects.

We have pointed out earlier in this chapter the closeness of Benco’s and D’Annunzio’s literary styles; a more elaborate example was given through the comparison of *La figlia di Iorio* and *Falena*, in Chapter IV. In the case of the writings of Oscar Wilde, it is not certain if Benco had read *Salomé* in particular. There are certainly “echos of *Salomé*” since the themes, ideas and atmosphere of *Abisso* in many ways recall Wilde’s play.⁵¹ This is primarily because of the emphasis given in both texts to the erotic, and to the immoral and neurotic relationships in the plot. We can recognise some of the aspects of Wilde’s characters in *Abisso*: for example Herod’s unlawful union with Herodiade (wife of his brother), his inebriation, his weariness with Herodiade and lust for Salome are in many ways present in the figure of the warrior Hanno. As the story unfolds, the atmosphere in *Abisso* gradually turns morbid; its leading characters, Mariela and Hanno in particular, just like the characters in *Salomé*, become obsessed with perversity, which eventually leads towards catastrophe.

When Schmidgall discusses Strauss’s *Salome* and the literary sources which lie behind Wilde’s play, among the authors mentioned are Baudelaire, Flaubert, Mallarmé and Edgar Allan Poe. The author draws attention to Poe’s ability “to infuse a kind of nervous psychic energy”, a feature which influences Wilde’s play and to which Strauss responds in his music (Schmidgall 1977: 252). The following quotation, which Schmidgall gives to support his viewpoint, tells of Poe’s preoccupations, at the same time summarising the kind of anxieties and themes of lust which were to appeal to many writers, including Benco:

There is in man ... a mysterious force which modern philosophy does not wish to take into consideration; nevertheless, without this nameless force ... a host of human action will remain unexplained, inexplicable. These actions are inexplicable only because they are bad or dangerous; they possess the fascination of the abyss. This primitive, irresistible force is natural Perversity,

⁴⁹ “Totalmente chiuso entro l’orizzonte della foia erotica”, in *La Stampa*, 6 February 1979.

⁵⁰ “...D’estrazione totalmente letteraria, scritti in un linguaggio dannunziano così datato da sfiorare il ridicolo del *kitsch*, ... sono ipotesi drammatiche astratte, che non affondano radici in nessuna realtà di coscienza né di costume, from *La Stampa*, 6 February 1979.

⁵¹ Fedele D’Amico pointed out that there are “echoes” of *Salomé* in *Abisso*. Cf. D’Amico 1980, “Antonio Smareglia”, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by S. Sadie, vol. 17, pp. 387 - 388.

which makes man constantly and simultaneously a murderer and a suicide, an assassin and a hangman.” [Edgar Allan Poe, in Schmidgall, *Literature as Opera*, pp. 253-4]⁵²

Benco’s fascination with the unknown forces which disturb the human subconscious, as well as the interest in eroticism itself were revealed in the concept of his first libretto, *Falena*. The kind of morbid atmosphere created around the King, Stellio, and the night spirit, Falena, is explored further in *Abisso*; as Isotta pointed out, “morbid, indefinite atmosphere ... mirrors the nature of *Abisso*”.⁵³ This time Benco included in the plot more destructive events, such as ‘sexual violence’ (end of act I), adultery (act II), and murder (act III), which therefore led him to express the verses in a more direct language. However, unlike Wilde in *Salomé* for example, Benco did not create vivid images of passion or perversity in his text. An example of the contrast between the two texts can be seen when looking at Salome’s long speech addressed to Jochanaan (in act I of Strauss’s opera) :

“Jochanaan!
 I am amorous of thy body, Jochanaan!
 Thy body is white
 like the lilies of a field
 untouched by the reaper.
 Thy body is white like the snows
 on the hills of Judea.
 The roses in the garden of the Arabian Queen
 are not as white as thy body,
 nor the roses in the Queen’s garden,
 nor the feet of the dawn
 alighting on the leaves,
 not the breast of the moon
 when she lies on the breast of the sea.
 Nothing in the world
 is as white as thy body.
 Suffer me to touch thy body.”

Instead of elaborate and obsessive discourses of lust, as uttered by Salome, Benco’s characters use detached, shorter lines, to express their desires. We can find numerous such lines throughout the libretto accompanying the barbaric behaviour of Hanno, Vito, or Mariela. An

⁵² The quotation from Baudelaire’s essay on Poe derives from the preamble to Poe’s tale *The Imp of the Perverse*, in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. I shall like to thank Dr. Paul Barnaby for the advice in this area.

⁵³ “Quelle atmosfere morbose e indefinite ... [rispecchiano] la natura di *Abisso*”, Paolo Isotta, in his article “Il fascino malato dell’*Abisso*”, in *Il Giornale degli Spettacoli*, 6 February 1979.

example can be seen in act I, when, on his arrival at the peasants' cottage, the German warrior Hanno faces Gisca, saying:

"Ha, ha! Come è bella!
Questa ribelle meco vo' condurre!
Altro vedrai, camozza, che i tuoi monti,
altro vedrai, se duri fino a l'alba
la sete che ho di te!..." [libretto, p. 12-13]
 [Ha, ha! How beautiful she is!
 This rebel I shall take with me!
 You shall see other things than your mountains, *camozza*,
 You shall see other things, if my hunger for you
 lasts until the dawn!...]

Moreover, Benco's stage directions stimulate further the erotic component, as in the following example: "He hesitates at first, then grasps again at her, bends the resisting [Gisca] in order to kiss her lips, holding both of her wrists".⁵⁴ In order to see how Smareglia responded to such literary stimulus, let us turn to the music.

VI. 5 Music

His music often seemed to exist alongside the drama instead of being properly geared to it.
 [Waterhouse, *The Emergence of Modern Italian Music*, p. 58]

Although Waterhouse's observation applies to all three Benco – Smareglia operas, it is particularly accurate in the case of *Abisso*. While with *Falena* and especially *Oceana* the composer succeeded in fusing Benco's text with his music, it seems that with the subject of *Abisso* Smareglia achieved a different kind of 'compromise'. The present section has the purpose of investigating what was the composer's response to the features of Benco's drama mentioned earlier in this chapter; *Abisso*'s dark story, obsessed with eroticism in a time of war, seemed hardly suitable for a composer of such purely musical inclination. Compared with *Oceana* and *Falena*, *Abisso*'s libretto differs primarily because of its realistic setting. However, despite such a background, Benco's verses were phrased more in an evocative language, with half-expressed meanings, creating images often in a manner close to the Symbolists: an example can be found at the very beginning of the libretto, when Gisca and Mariela comment

⁵⁴ "Egli esita un istante, poi la riafferra, curva sotto di sè la ripugnante per baciarle la bocca, tenendola ad ambo i polsi", see Benco [n. d.], *Abisso: dramma lirico in tre atti*, Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno, p. 22.

that the “The night talks! The night sings! The night is alone”, or in the old Anselmo’s reply “The more quiet the night is, the deeper it talks...”.⁵⁵

Although such poetic verses were still “provocative of music”, as an anonymous critic called them, the drama they articulated was more introverted and unlike *Oceana*’s picturesque settings it suggested more dissonant images.⁵⁶ It is curious to find a similar parallel in the late paintings of Böcklin, which were also recognised as more gloomy and full of sharp contrasts.⁵⁷ As we have seen, Böcklin was an artist whose work deeply influenced Benco and of whom, curiously, Louis Laloy thought when commenting on the illustrations of Strauss’s *Salome*. The quotation can be found in Schmidgall’s book: “the music of Mr. Strauss is far from resembling the compositions of Beardsly [sic] ... it recalls rather the crude and fiery colors of Böcklin” (Schmidgall 1977: 271).⁵⁸ Nevertheless, even though Benco’s was an expression of a psychological drama which fused two contrasting themes (of love and war), most of the conflicts in the plot, as well as the development of the characters, were articulated less powerfully. There are, as one critic had noticed, many “theatrically dangerous episodes” (*teatralmente episodi pericolosi*) in the libretto. Such features of the poet’s work had repercussions on the opera’s structure.

*i. Symphonism in opera – “dramma sinfonizzato”*⁵⁹

The discussion of Smareglia’s music, as of Benco’s libretto, began in the critical reviews written at the time of the opera’s premiere. A large number of critics thought that there was, similarly to *Oceana*, “too much music” in *Abisso*, which may seem surprising if we consider the material Benco provided in the libretto. The musical flow was seen as too dense and too continuous, so that at the end of the opera more than one journalist felt tired, expressing a desire for “some short break” (G. B. Nappi). In his remark Nappi pointed out how the music was “melodious music from beginning to end in the orchestra and often on stage”, emphasising that the actual drama resided in the orchestra.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ *Gisca*: La notte parla! *Mariela*: La notte canta! *Gisca*: La notte è sola. *Anselmo*: Più tace la notte e più profonda parla..., *ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁶ “Versi provocatori di musica”, from *Il Sole*, 11 February 1914.

⁵⁷ About the late phase of Böcklin’s work, see Rolf Andree, *Arnold Böcklin*.

⁵⁸ The composer who also found similarities between the art of Böcklin and that of Richard Strauss was Claude Debussy. See Richard Langham Smith 1977, ed. and trans., *Debussy on Music*, London: Secker and Warburg, p. 270.

⁵⁹ The comment written by Gaianus, in *Il Resto del Carlino*, 26 January 1926.

⁶⁰ “Musica melodica da cima a fondo in orchestra e spesso sul palcoscenico”, in *La Perseveranza*, 11 February 1914.

The symphonism was the feature of the opera most keenly discussed among the critics. It was thought that the composer approached the work by blending what Italian critics called *forma sinfonica* with *dramma musicato*. The result was, as with *Oceana*, a symphonic poem with added voices. The critic G. B. Nappi went as far as warning the audience about the possibility of a misunderstanding: it could seem that the composer added the words or the voices to an instrumental work composed previously.⁶¹ Agostino Cameroni, who can be taken as a representative of a whole series of opinions, described the flow of music in *Abisso* as “uninterrupted symphony”. Another critic was struck by “dramatic inefficiency” in the opera, pointing out that Smareglia’s talent for symphonism “... overwhelms ... the [effective] expression of dramatic elements”.⁶² It was understood that Smareglia was creating his own rules in composing the opera: he was extending “the rights of the music ... in order to exalt the lyrical drama also with the elements of symphonism”.⁶³

What seems most fascinating in analysing the score of *Abisso* is the independence of the instrumental commentary in it. Some critics, such as Vito Levi, thought that this “expanded” symphonism was “pushed to the limit”, and was designed by the composer in order to incorporate into it the tension of the text. To support this view, one interesting musical moment might be examined: the beginning of act III (prelude and scene I). Besides providing a most curious example of the composer’s independent musical writing, it is perhaps one of Smareglia’s most inspired musical movements. In contrast to the turbulent dramatic ending of the second act (the battlefield, along with Gisca’s nervous breakdown), act III is in a completely different mood. It is the part of the drama placed in a castle in Lombardy, one month after the battle (act II) between the German enemy and the Lombards, during which Hanno, Mariela and Gisca became imprisoned. As Benco suggested in his stage setting, it is a bright morning of May, illustrated on the stage with “the immense space of the sky”.⁶⁴

The composer introduces this setting with the only real orchestral introduction in the opera.⁶⁵ What distinguishes this brief prelude from the rest of the music of *Abisso* is its unusual character: the mood it creates gives the impression of an orchestral *fantasia* [see **Example VI A**].

⁶¹ The full quotation is as follows: “...tanto da ingenerare quasi l’errato sospetto che egli abbia sovrapposte le parole ad un lavoro istrumentale precedentemente composto”, in *La Perseveranza*, 11 February 1914.

⁶² “Soverchia ... l’estrinsecazione degli elementi drammatici”, in *Il Secolo*, 11 February 1914.

⁶³ Nappi explains that Smareglia extends “...i diritti della vera musica ... per far assurgere il dramma lirico anche cogli elementi del sinfonismo, G. B. Nappi, in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 261.

⁶⁴ “Al di là della cinta merlata non si vede altro che lo spazio immenso del cielo, in un limpido mattino di maggio”, from the libretto, p. 51.

⁶⁵ Rather than a full overture, the brief orchestral introduction at the beginning of the opera has more the function of a prologue in which the opera’s five leading motifs are announced. Only several of the leitmotifs are mentioned here; their names have been chosen by the author, and for the most part, correspond with Perpich, *Il teatro musicale*.

Example VI A: *Abisso*, act III, Prelude, v. s. p. 156-158

156

Atto terzo.

Una terrazza sul torrione del castello. La guerniscono intorno merli possenti e in grave ordine continuano su la cinta murata del borgo. Una angusta scala incassata nella muraglia conduce ai piani inferiori della rocca. Sopra la scala si erge, costruito nel vivo della muratura, un piccolo sarrario, e leva la sua campana all'aria libera, tra merlo e merlo. Una larga fune penzola dalla campana. Ai di là della cinta merlata non si vede altro che lo spazio immenso del cielo. In un azzurro e radioso mattino di maggio.

*Vivace. M.M. ♩. 116.**ritardando*

f *stacc.* *dim.* *ritardando*

Molto tranquillo. ♩. 92. *p*

1

Example VI A , v. s. p. 157

157

2

3

mf *dim.* *(tr)*

(tr) *(tr)* *(tr)* *3*

mf *p* *3*

(Si alza la tela.) *cresc.* *cresc.* *3*

Example VI A, v. s. p. 158

158
 (Mariela sale giulivamente la scala, balza su la spianata e ascende i due o tre gradini che conducono ai merli; di là fa cenni giocondi al sole che si spande nell'aria.)

Vivace.

4

ritard.

Più tranquillo. . . 92.

Arp.

p

Mariela.

Mi av - vol - gi mi au - re - o - li, o lu - ce!

M. lon - ta - ni mie - i mon - ti ti

M. ver - sa - no a flut - ti su i pia - ni!

It could be said that the movement consists of new thematic material in comparison to the previous two acts: the only exception is a short theme associated with the character of Gisca [see **Example VI B**] incorporated in the main melodic contour [see **Example VI C**, iii on p. 195]:

Example VI B: Gisca



Though essentially a long, single theme, its colour continuously changes as it is played first by clarinet solo, then the oboe, flute, gradually involving the rest of the woodwind instruments and horns. As in a dialogue (between the woodwinds with horns, and with occasional contributions from violins), the instruments delicately create an unbroken polyphonic melody, whose harmony is defined by the protracted pedal on A and by the tremolo in violas. We notice the composer's particularly imaginative orchestration as, half way through the prelude, violins intensify the sound by gradually taking over the main thematic line from the woodwinds. The harmonic background which envelops this texture is coloured simply: for the first half of the prelude the composer employs the sustained pedal on the tonic, above which there are chords on principally dominant and subdominant of A major. In the central part of the movement we can observe a series of widely spaced modulations, establishing the keys of a minor, F major, d minor, C major and E major [see v. s. p. 156/5/4 to 157/3/3]. The varied repetition and interlacing of fragments of the main theme is accompanied by light orchestration, with a telling colouristic contribution from harp.⁶⁶

Although the orchestral texture of this prelude mainly consists of new material, a closer examination reveals that some of its parts resemble themes or motifs encountered in Smareglia's earlier operas, in *Oceana* for example. In the prelude to act II of *Oceana* (the sea nocturne) there were two themes of particularly meditative character; both were played by the woodwind instruments and had a refined orchestral accompaniment. These two themes were associated with Nersa and were used to intensify the poetic atmosphere rather than for dramatic effect [cf. Chapter V, themes 12 and 12a]. The music of this prelude is in a similarly poetic manner. Following the three introductory bars of the orchestra repeating, in a *vivace*, the figures on a broken A major triad, there is a *molto tranquillo* section. The sinuous phrasing of the principal theme is continuously intensified by its apparently endless movement during which Smareglia reiterates seemingly the same material. During the course of the gradual unfolding of this melody, we can discern seven different fragments [see **Example VI C**]:

⁶⁶ The purpose of this description is to highlight some of the particularities (of orchestration, for example) which cannot be seen in the vocal score. The contribution from the harp is particularly noticeable as accompaniment to Mariela, once she appears on stage [see v. s. p. 158/2/1 to 162/1/3].

Example VI C: *Abisso*, act III, fragments of the main theme

Although of a similar mood, we can notice that these single or two bars phrases are characterised by distinctly ascending or (and) descending motion [**fragment ii, iv, v, vi, vii**], by employing a triplet at the end of the phrase [**fragment iv, v, vi**], by syncopation [**fragment iii, iv, v, vi**] or by dotted rhythm [**all fragments iv**]. It is noticeable that their melodic contour often involves the intervals of a perfect fourth or of a fifth, used irregularly. More importantly, we can perceive the theme constantly being decorated with a startling number of appoggiaturas, as well as with passing notes, and anticipations, resembling expressive Wagnerian turn of phrase, but also the orchestral writing of Gustav Mahler.

As the orchestral texture gradually extends further, intensifying the sound by assembling (at last), the main theme both in the violins and the woodwinds, the prelude is brought to an end; it is signaled by the repetition of the first three introductory bars of the movement. However, as the curtain rises, we hear the greater part of the prelude again. This time the composer includes Mariela's voice: we see her walking happily on the terrace of the castle's tower. Apparently without a care of being imprisoned, she is happily in love, expressing her serenity by

addressing the sun and the light of which she feels a part.⁶⁷ The reason why the composer repeated the music of the prelude immediately afterwards, in scene I, is because its atmosphere *is* about Mariela. We notice that the composer fuses her melody into the orchestral texture by treating the voce similarly to an instrument. In fact, at first Mariela echoes the melodic phrases which were heard previously in the flute or in the clarinet [see **Example VI D a, b, d**].⁶⁸

Examples VI D: *Abisso*, act III

Mariela

o. s. p.15, bars 1-3



Mariela

o. s. p.16, bars 1-4



b)



Mariela



c)



⁶⁷ The critic Mario Nordio described Mariela as singing “to the sun”, in *Il Piccolo*, 10 February 1914, while Levi described it as an “*inno al mattino*”, in the programme booklet of the Teatro Verdi di Trieste, 1979.

⁶⁸ Another example of the voice underlying the orchestral melody can be seen in the second half of act II, in a short scene, following Gisca’s attempt to kill Hanno [see v. s. p. 134-136].

Mariela
o. s. p. 18, bars 1-3

text: oha mei pri-mi fre-mi-ti dei pia-nie dei pra-ti,

d)
o. s. p. 5, bars 1-3, flute

Mariela
o. s. p. 21

text: Un ba-cio di so-le su fron-te di

e)
o. s. p. 21, flute/clarinet

At other times, the voice is immersed in the orchestral polyphony: its melodies emerge, underlining the expression of solo flute [see **Example d**], or violins [see **Example c**]. Although it principally follows the theme's (pre-existing) melodic contour, the voice never dominates. Instead, it intensifies the poetic atmosphere, giving at this point something of the structure of a 'song for voice and orchestra': Mariela's happiness radiates, as she feels herself to be "la sorella del sole".

This light, improvisational manner in which the composer adds the voice to the orchestral fabric, is intensified with the entrance of Hanno. Unfolding in the form of a dialogue, the scene is the last 'love' duet, which precedes the ultimate catastrophe of the opera's finale. In no other scene does Smareglia's music seem so consistently attuned to the significance of the text and situation. Set as a single unified piece, the duet fuses together a series of melodious passages (Mariela) and more *declamato* parts (Hanno), corresponding to the character's feelings.⁶⁹ When Hanno appears, Mariela is still daydreaming on the castle terrace; his appearance is at first accompanied by a short instrumental passage in which the violins carry on with the prelude music, gradually raising it to the highest registers. The idyllic mood however, threatens to vanish. Underneath the fragile sonority we hear the dark resonance of violoncelli solo. Their slow phrasing of the motif which throughout the opera is associated with Hanno, painfully repeated, suggests that he feels miserable and physically weak [see v. s. p. 160/4/3]. He tries to resist Mariela's radiant happiness by constantly reminding her of the horrible reality around them. At first Hanno's line is immersed in the orchestral texture [in "Orsu, che piangi tu", v. s. p. 161/1/1], occasionally echoing the music of the prelude. The passages which follow mark his

⁶⁹ It seems relevant to point to the similarity of Hanno's 'entrance' in this scene as well as the manner in which Smareglia develops this duet to the scene of Falena and Stellio in act II of *Falena*. Cf. Chapter IV. 5. ii, example IV C.

temporary resistance to this pastoral mood: set in *Un poco più animato* his voice [“Fuggire, qui è la morte”, v. s. p. 162/3/3] is more agitated at Mariela’s ignorance of his life being in danger [“Ah non sai! Udito non l’hai tu” v. s. p. 164/4/1]. As he begins to comfort Mariela (“E te che piangi”), we sense that he has given in [cf. Chapter I, **Example I. 3. D**, o. s. p. 25-26]. The voices in the dialogue start to correspond, condensing into a passionate finale supported by an all involving orchestra, and producing an effect equal to Puccini’s thematic recalls [v. s. p. 168/3/4 – 171/3/1].

It could be said that this duet is lyrically effective to such an extent that, for a moment, the listener forgets who these two characters really are. Smareglia’s music communicates the kind of passions which hardly depict a savage soldier and an immoral young woman - we hear the sweet sound celebrating lovers close to the world of Tristan and Isolde. As Nicolaisen described it, “the love duet characteristic of Italian opera after 1893 is an orchestrally continuous affair with sequences that carry the voices ever higher” (Nicolaisen 1980: 253).

ii. *Vocal writing in Abisso: “exasperating sing-song” (cantillazione snervante) G. C. Il Secolo, 1914.*

Before investigating the examples of Smareglia’s vocal writing in *Abisso*, let us for a moment return to Waterhouse’s comment quoted at the beginning of the section on music. As was explained, the notion that in Smareglia’s operas music seems to exist alongside the drama applies to a certain extent to all three of the Benco - Smareglia operas. There is a prevailing opinion that all of his operas are overabundant with music, and more specifically with *Abisso*, that its subject was not exactly suitable for Smareglia’s nature. On a broader scale, in the case of this opera, Smareglia’s music does in a certain way “exist alongside the drama”. The impression which one gets from reading Benco’s text is notably different from the impression one gets from listening to Smareglia’s music. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to declare Smareglia’s music as not in tune with its chosen subject, or that it is articulated in a completely undramatic way, as the critic of *Il Secolo* put it.

What we have in *Abisso* is Smareglia’s different interpretation of the qualities of Benco’s text. The composer retained Benco’s verses, but was far from attempting to set to music the morbid elements of its triangle drama. Smareglia portrayed it in his own way; thus Hanno, Gisca and Mariela show their softer side, musically behaving less vulgarly than in Benco’s text. A good example can be seen at the end of act I, in the brief and melodious dialogue between Gisca and Hanno, at the moment in which she surrenders to the warrior [see **Example VI E**]. Gisca’s ‘capitulation’ is evoked in a brief lyrical arioso, with a particularly ardent beginning of her phrase (stretching for an octave), which gradually winds its way down through appoggiaturas,

while Hanno's reply employs what was Gisca's melody from the beginning of the act ["L'uomo che m'amerà", v. s. p. 13]:

Example VI E: *Abisso*, act I, Gisca: "M'hai fatta tua", v. s. p. 57-59

47

Gisca. (si libera con uno strappo e lo afferra)

M'hai fat - ta

H. spin - gi? Non ti svin-co-li tu?

58 (con forza)

G. tu - - a; tu - a per l'ar-mi che in-

mf *dimin.* *p*

G. pu - gni, tu - a per l'em-pia for-za del brac - cio,

G. tu - a per la cru-de-le ver-go-gna di Ma-rie-la,

mp *p* *dolente*

G. per le mu-te la-gri-me di quel vec-chio: e tua son

G. i - o! Pren - - di-mi: tut-to il mio do-lo-re a te! Io mi do - no ne l'o-dio

59

48

Similarly to Hanno and Mariela in act III, both characters are given the expressiveness which seems characteristic more of someone who is in love; what Smareglia evoked here is Gisca sacrificing to Hanno everything of what she is, while Hanno tries utterly to win her attention. It seems that the composer imagined the drama of *Abisso* from a different perspective: as the critic Italo Camillo Martelli noticed, Smareglia “ennobled” characters’ passions, making the drama lighter by concealing much of what was essentially sexual and perverse in the story. Martelli described it as the composer putting “*sordina*” on the erotic instincts which connect the main protagonists.⁷⁰ On the basis of this view, it is possible to comprehend better what Benco meant in his comment that the opera was “quite interesting, although it has unusual structure”.⁷¹ The result was that *Abisso* was unlike what the poet wished to portray in his libretto. Benco in his *Ricordi* confirmed this assumption by saying that Smareglia would never be attracted by sexually disturbed characters such as Salome.⁷² In order to illustrate the manner in which Smareglia’s music *is* dramatic in the opera, let us take a closer look at some parts of the second act of the opera.

⁷⁰ One scene in which the composer does follow the erotic element in the plot can be seen in act I of the opera [see v. s. p. 29-30]. It is the moment in which, as the German barbarian breaks into Anselmo’s cottage, he first notices Gisca. Smareglia evoked Hanno’s lust by varying the orchestral texture, articulating changes of rhythm, by sudden and short modulations, by accelerating Hanno’s leitmotif (its harmony changing from the original, e minor, to E flat major chord), and by the pulsation of chromatic bass notes, combined with short instrumental figure of two semiquavers.

⁷¹ From Benco’s letter to the composer, see p. 174 of this chapter.

⁷² See p. 178 of this chapter.

According to Benco's *Ricordi*, as well as to the writings of Smareglia's two sons, Act II was the part of the opera which the composer first set to music. In one of the few articles written by Smareglia himself, entitled "Come nascono le melodie?", the composer recalled that once Benco had read him the finale of the second act, he thought the closing scene of the act to be particularly complex and difficult to stage.⁷³ Nevertheless, Smareglia had an immediate inspiration as to how to carry it through music: "stopping for a moment, I heard in my mind an orchestral movement of which I vaguely sang a few notes..."⁷⁴ Although disappointingly vague in his writing, Smareglia emphasised how, several months later, when setting this episode to music, his mind recalled the same musical idea as when Benco first read him the text.

Set in a castle in Lombardy, act II is the part of the plot which depicts the life of the protagonists after they have abandoned Anselmo's cottage: Hanno is inebriated, encouraging vulgar behaviour towards the two sisters.⁷⁵ The impression which this act leaves on a listener is of a continuous and complex musico-dramatic texture. Within this texture, there are two episodes which are particularly interesting because they enable us to see how far Smareglia went in interpreting Benco's text. Besides having a crucial role in the story, Gisca's monologue and the 'priest' scene which follows it, are the examples of the composer's music at its most dramatically expressive.

It can be said that to a large extent the second act is concentrated on Gisca and her feelings. From the start of the opera we notice that, in the moments which involve Gisca, her phrases, although brief, are articulated with particular ardour. For example, the composer captures some psychological details of her character by depicting her reactions with forceful melodies: there are two instances in act I during which she interrupts Hanno's flirtatious comments towards her sister [see **Example VI F**]. Composed in short *arioso* phrases [an eight-bar phrase, see v. s. p. 73-74, or four-bar phrase, p. 77-78], in both examples Gisca's vocal part begins with repeated notes, the melody unfolding in a theme which throughout the opera is associated with her [cf. **Example VI B on p. 193**]: its chromatic and sinuous contour brings to life her jealousy, adding turbulence to the scene, and portraying her unstable and over-sensitive nature.⁷⁶

⁷³ For more on this article see Chapter I. 3. The scene in question involved several instances: the beginning of the battle, heard off-stage as well as on the stage, while the two sisters meet and finally confront each other, arguing over their relationship with Hanno. The act ends with Italian soldiers mortally wounding Vito, capturing Hanno and the sisters, while Gisca loses her sanity.

⁷⁴ Ma fermandomi un momento, sentii risuonarmi un movimento orchestrale che accennai vagamente colla voce...", see Smareglia's text "Come nascono le melodie?", in Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 306. This short article of the composer is important because it is one of the few which offers an insight into his aesthetic ideas.

⁷⁵ See synopsis, act I.

⁷⁶ Cf. with the music **Example VI E**. Smareglia employs a modified version of this *arioso* again towards the end of act II, at the moment when Gisca is about to try to kill Hanno, see v. s. p. 132.

Example VI F: *Abisso*, act I, Gisca and Hanno, v. s. p. 73-74

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system shows Gisca's vocal line (H. for Hanno) and piano accompaniment. Gisca's lyrics are: "Ah, mal tu - gno di nuo via - nuo - ri, di nuo - ve ebbrez - ze...". The piano part includes markings for *ritard.* and *a tempo*. The second system shows Hanno's vocal line (G. for Gisca) and piano accompaniment. Hanno's lyrics are: "men - ti o men - zo - gne - ro. Il san - gue di Ma -". The piano part includes a *mf* marking. The third system shows Gisca's vocal line (G. for Gisca) and piano accompaniment. Gisca's lyrics are: "rie - la non ob - bli - o l'of - fe - sa del suo ri - pu - dio, quand' el - la s'ill -". The piano part includes a *mf* marking.

The passage which draws a fuller portrait of Gisca is her monologue, “Il nembo della gioia s’allontana”. It is Gisca’s first more elaborate and self contained episode in act II, an aria-like episode, to which most critics referred as the “aria della face” (aria of the torch) [see **Appendix F. 2**]. This melody, which she sings in the candlelight once the others leave the stage, communicates the expression of a heartbroken soul. In itself, the aria can be identified as one of the finest in all of Smareglia’s operas, and was, as the composer revealed himself, nourished by his “anima slava”.⁷⁷ The composer set the entire monologue as a unified episode of quite

⁷⁷ From Levi, in the programme booklet of the Teatro Verdi, 1979.

considerable dimensions. The versification extends over 26 lines which Benco grouped in three irregular strophes, consisting of six, four and seventeen lines [see **Table 1, Appendix F. 1**].⁷⁸ Although the verses are structured very traditionally, comprising mainly 11-syllable lines, the regularity is obscured by their unusual layout and by the five long lines at the end of the monologue (13-syllable and 14-syllable). Furthermore, the configuration of each stanza varies, combining more incomplete lines (lines 9 to 15) with tidy lines (first stanza), and occasionally playing with rhyme (lines 14 to 18).

To this poetic model the composer responded with a structure which combines regular phrasing (such as 4+4+6 bar phrases in section B) with a free unfolding of the musical discourse. This resulted in a form in which Smareglia does not follow the design of Benco's text; in the overall structure we can discern three music sections (A, B, C). To foreshadow emotionally charged atmosphere, Smareglia overlaps the two sections: the beginning of orchestral introduction (section A) accompanies the end of the precedent vocal line (the culmination of Gisca's *declamato*). Her anger and despair in seeing Hanno leaving with her sister is accompanied by the whole orchestra employing the motif "del grido" (of "scream") [see **Example VI G**]. Its effect is emphasised by an additional change of tempo, from the previous *Più animato* to *Andante sostenuto*, and by unfolding of Gisca's motif [cf. **Example VI B, on p. 193**] followed by the progression of chromatic modulations and appoggiaturas, and leading to the beginning of her vocal part.

Example VI G – *Abisso*, act II, "scream" motif



The first seven lines of the text correspond to another musical section (B). We notice that from the very beginning the music suggests Gisca's upset and restless state. Her melody starts in a high register, *forte*, above the pedal on the dominant. As her anxiety culminates, uttering the words "or vibro e grido", we hear the motif of "scream", now employed both by the orchestra and her voice. The atmosphere temporarily calms down in the following part (C), which begins

⁷⁸ It is possible that the second and the third strophes of the libretto actually form a single strophe, since the printed text extends over two pages (see libretto, pp. 32-33).

with a short orchestral interlude; the composer employs the motif of “*capanna*” directing Gisca’s introspective mood, recalling her home [v. s. p. 93/3/2-93/5/1]. Her vocal part is fused with the transparent orchestration creating a particularly poetic effect: above the tremolo in the strings, marked in the score as *morendo*, the motif is articulated by the oboe solo, gradually involving the rest of the woodwinds. As the scene continues the music becomes more agitated. Benco’s third stanza is set more as a *declamato*, with short, restless phrases evoking the agony of Gisca’s soul. We note Smareglia’s responsiveness to the mood of the text: there is a circle of repetitive phrases [v. s. p. 94/3/3 - 4/2], and several changes of tempo: from *un poco animando*, *un poco mosso*, *primo tempo* leading to the climatic moment. “Egli non mi ama più” is underlined again by the motif of the “scream” in both Gisca and *tutti*. From this point, the texture proceeds by the contrast of details: following Gisca’s outcry we hear again the orchestral interlude from the beginning (section A); this time, however, its texture is in part accompanied by Gisca. Furthermore, it modulates into a seemingly new musical section (v. s. p. 95/3/1 to 96). Smareglia captured this moment admirably with the change of tonal colour (modulation from d to D major). A closer look at the theme reveals that it is a transformation of the melody sung by Gisca at the beginning of the monologue (cf. section B).

The scene concludes with Gisca in her resigned mood; feeling fragile, she thinks she no longer has a place in her lover’s heart and feels her soul is dying. Although Benco set this part of the monologue in five longer lines (13 and 14-syllable) Smareglia nevertheless decided to use and modify Gisca’s earlier melody, extending what was a four-bar into a five-bar section. Such a gesture can perhaps be explained by his desire to obtain the effect of a vague ‘ABA’ form: this section concludes with a clear cadenza, and returns to the dominant pedal on A which, at last, resolves in the pedal on D. This way the composer carefully links the end of the monologue with its beginning. It can be said that the detail which softens the formal closure of the arioso is the melodic line avoiding resolution: it prolongs the dominant harmony, concluding in an undefined key of “d”, unfolding into the texture of the interlude heard earlier (part C). The fact that this episode embodies the kind of procedures which clearly belong to Italian traditional opera from the turn of the century confirms Smareglia’s gift in responding to the text by using the craft he inherited to fashion a design of his own.

The next example is the ‘priest’ scene. Following Gisca’s monologue, the development of the drama is, for a while, transferred into her subconscious: it is the episode of the plot in which she sees an apparition of a priest. Benco regarded this scene as “decisive for the major or minor success of the opera”.⁷⁹ It seems sensible to believe that the poet thought of this inner agony of Gisca to be dramatically very important for the plot, since the events which follow Gisca’s

⁷⁹ From a letter written in December 1913, quoted in Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*, p. 83.

hallucination were mainly caused by her change in attitude: it leads her to attempt to kill Hanno, and made her call for the battle. The poet's manner of articulating this part of the drama (as well as the previous monologue scene) resembles the 'latent dramaturgy' which was characteristic of *Oceana*, and to an extent *Falena*'s libretto. It is a poetic, unreal moment in the story, which is conveyed by the large number of verses, forming a dialogue between the two characters: the kind of poetic moment which could be best evoked by music. Gisca's 'vision' of a priest, symbolizing the echo of her own conscience, Smareglia animated as a psychological, self contained music-drama.⁸⁰

The scene is structured through numerous sections, fused in an unbroken musical flow with an especially active orchestral part. Since this scene's dimensions cover one third of the act, the following analysis will focus on only a few of its passages. Particularly effective is the very beginning of the scene, since it is blended with the apparent 'postlude' to Gisca's monologue [see **Appendix F. 3**, v. s. p. 97]. The composer darkens the overall mood by gradually dissolving the remains of the postlude; the new thematic material consists of short, abrupt motifs played in a low register of the contrabass, then in bass-tuba and trombone solo, followed by the horns, under which there is a low-lying tremolo in the strings. The first utterance of the priest (who is a baritone) is dark and solemn; however, we hear Gisca's impulsive reaction, her fear phrased in similar terms to her melodies heard earlier in the act, in *animando*, then *allegro moderato*. Her arioso consists of short, gasping phrases which are soon adopted by the priest himself. It could be said that the whole first section [v. s. p. 96-101] consists of their 'arguing': the oscillation of melodious with more chromatic phrasing is embedded in vigorous orchestral music, and expressed at a fast pace with numerous dynamic changes.

The scene proceeds with a complete change of mood. For example, the following section [section II, see v. s. p. 101-107] is distinguished by modulation to E major, in which we note a particular difference in the way the priest expresses himself. His character reveals a 'moralizing' dimension. This is evoked in music by the articulation of his vocal part in solemn melodic phrases: his oration has a steady, almost 'soldierly' pace, underlined by the sustained harmony of the dominant chord, which however, never resolves. Smareglia lines up modulations of 'distant' tonalities: E major to Aflat major, or Gflat to D major are directed in a slow but solemn manner, their harmonic colour achieving the effect of 'illuminating' the words of the priest. The texture which follows continues to unfold in a different manner. For example, the composer delineated the effect of the priest's words on Gisca by gradually softening her anxiety, while liberating and transforming the priest's expression: this time it is both

⁸⁰ It was Levi who suggested that the figure of the priest symbolises an "incarnazione della coscienza lombarda", in the programme pamphlet of the Teatro Comunale di Trieste, 1979.

harmonically and lyrically more dense. The rest of the scene gradually becomes more intense, as the pace broadens, advancing the unfolding of the drama to the turbulent ending of the act.

VI.6 Conclusion

L'orchestra infatti è la grande incitatrice del movimento drammatico; anzi, in essa risiede essenzialmente il dramma. Essa è l'aculeo potente, che sprona l'azione, *che non lascia requie alla parola*, che invade, con la possanza, e con la varietà dei suoi effetti, la sala. Noi ci siamo avvinti ad essa: la scena quasi si annebbia in un effetto di miraggi innanzi al nostro sguardo o, meglio, attraverso le sensazioni dell'udito. [M. Lessona, "Il grande successo dell' *Abisso* alla Scala", in *La Stampa*, 1914. Also in: Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, pp. 279-80, except for the part* marked].

[The orchestra is, as a matter of fact, the great inciter of the dramatic movement; indeed, the drama essentially resides in the orchestra. It is the powerful goad, which spurs on the action, *which leaves the word no rest *, which invades the hall with its power and with a variety of its effects. We are wrapped up in its sound: the stage seems almost blurred from the effects of mirages before our eyes, or even more so, through our sense of hearing].

The comment of the Turinese critic comes particularly close to describing the kind of opera that Smareglia created with *Abisso*. In this opera, the composer's tendency to conjure up the drama by symphonic means is developed further because of the way the orchestra continuously blends with the vocal parts. In his approach to Benco's libretto, the composer showed particular interest in the poetic qualities of the text. This at times occurs at the expense of the drama: although the music is most expressive, it does not embody the kind of drama one would usually expect. It seems that Smareglia's approach to the task resembles that of a composer who was producing a *literary opera*. In his book on Robert Schumann, entitled *Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age"*, Daverio draws to Schumann's dramatic music, such as his opera *Genoveva* (Leipzig 1850), and the fact that it has been judged as undramatic. Schumann's approach to drama is one that "gives primacy of place to the comprehensibility of a poetic text" (Daverio 1997: 331). Such an understanding of musical drama is inherent in Smareglia and we can recognise it also when Daverio points out Schumann's particular interest in the poetic quality of the text. It is also clear that Schumann puts more value on the poetic source at the expense of the stage effects. In the case of Smareglia's operas, the singular features were inherent in their libretti, since unlike those of *literary opera*, Benco's texts do not exist as self-sufficient literary works.

It is noticeable that, more than in his previous works, in this opera there are aria-like structures and duets (as dialogues); furthermore, they are articulated in the manner which reveals the composer to be closer than ever to Italian lyricism. As Levi pointed out, Smareglia added to the voices that dosage of “tragic intensity”, so inherent in Italian *melodramma*, enriching it in the same way that his more popular contemporary, Puccini, did.

Although Smareglia was, in one way, unable to understand the perverted and complicated kind of passions imagined by Benco, his music, on the other hand, expressed most powerfully the story of love in a time of war. *Abisso* marks the end of Smareglia’s career, proving that either his imagination, or his incredible strength of will to dictate what he imagined, were exhausted. Even though Smareglia clearly reveals that he thoroughly studied Wagner’s as well as Strauss’s orchestral language, he assimilated it in his own style and one should not regret the influence of German schools.⁸¹ Perhaps with his operas Smareglia did not meet the preferences of the Italian audience, whose critics suggested that he could improve the opera by “lightening it a bit”.⁸² Nevertheless, the composer “tried his own way”.⁸³ Even though this caused him to remaining isolated, Smareglia confirmed once again his achievement and originality in the creation of Italian opera.

⁸¹ It seems difficult not to point to the resemblance of one of Smareglia’s passages to the harmonies of Wagner’s *Tristan*, in particular the harmonic and melodic progression of the ‘Tristan chord’. The moment in question is in act II, the scene in which the voices of the three main protagonists fuse into the same orchestral melody, see Chapter I. 3, **Example I. 3. C**.

⁸² M. Lessona, in *La Stampa* 1914.

⁸³ In *ibid*.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

For the opera the only suitable subjects are such as could not exist or reach complete expression without music.

[Busoni, in Schmidgall, *Literature as Opera*, p. 4]

1. Summary and conclusions

This thesis demonstrates Smareglia's place in Italian opera at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries by examining his last three operas. The studies of *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* show the outstanding originality of their style, and highlight the determination of the composer and his librettist to create a new type of opera in which the musical aspects predominate over the dramatic ones. This anti-theatrical tendency in the opera house can be described as a "*teatro di poesia*" since its style and aims correspond to the changes which affected contemporary Italian literary theatre and which have been described in those terms. The novel approach was introduced in the theatre by the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio and the actress Eleonora Duse in the mid 1890s.

The major aims of this thesis have been to introduce *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso*, to explain the manner in which these operas were created, and to investigate their musico-dramatic structure and those elements of style which are the most significant and which indicate their belonging to the "poetic theatre". The questions which have been addressed are first, what was the perception of the operas at the time of their premieres? Secondly, who was the poet and what sources inspired him to create these libretti? Thirdly, how were the texts conceived? And fourthly, how did the composer respond to such texts?

This thesis has argued that Smareglia's last compositional phase and his contribution to the development of "poetic theatre" was largely conditioned by his relationship with his new librettist at the time, Silvio Benco. As explained, right from the start of their collaboration, their operas provoked intense discussion, causing some of the critics to dismiss the works and others to search for new explanations in order to describe their novel style. It was seen that *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* have little in common with other operas of the time. Furthermore, these operas were very distinct from Smareglia's previous works, making it obvious that the

fundamental change in the composer's operatic style was related to his collaboration with the young librettist.

An introduction to the character of Benco has allowed a more complete understanding of the artist and his background. An overview of his career has revealed that he was primarily a journalist, novelist and a patriot with a passionate interest in music and arts. He was an artist without whom Trieste's history and *letteratura triestina* is "unimaginable". Although libretto writing was a marginal activity for him, he is remembered mostly for his successful collaboration with Smareglia. What is particularly significant about Benco's texts is the fact that all three are created out of his own imagination. Therefore, the question recurrently asked in this study is was what fed his fantasy? What sources lie behind *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso*?

One of the findings is that the overall style of the three libretti, their ideas and themes correspond with that of his own novels. The artistic tendencies that shaped Benco's novel *Il castello dei desideri* are those of Symbolism and Decadence, the same which are infused in *Falena* and *Abisso*. We can see these features in the attention given to the subconscious world of the characters, in their distorted and morbid fantasies, and their quest for sensations. As explained, the concept of his story *Falena* is not what some critics of the period described as a "childish" invented legend, but is rather a product of a writer whose imagination was immersed in the kind of themes we find running through the works of leading authors of the time, such as D'Annunzio, Huysmans, Maeterlinck and Wilde, as well as in the works of their own models, such as Gautier, Baudelaire, Flaubert and Poe. A series of new trends that emerged during that period, the phenomenon which Pierrot called the "decadent imagination", underlines Benco's literary taste.¹ Furthermore, a look at the Italian literature of the period reveals that Benco's creation of *Falena*, her outward appearance, magical powers and the idea of introducing dream-sequences into the play stand as a valuable contribution to Italian literature of the period, since the other examples of similar themes can be found mainly in the works of D'Annunzio. In fact Benco was experimenting with new literary taste on the operatic stage earlier than D'Annunzio did.

With the next opera Benco and Smareglia confirmed that their collaboration was dedicated to creating a different kind of opera. Both artists clearly expressed this view in the interviews given prior to the opera's premiere. As Smareglia said, the purpose was to give the impression of "*un quadro musicale*", in which the dramatic and symphonic elements are fused together. Benco was writing about "pictures of scenic landscape and music" and "an ambient of pure music", pointing out that the opera entailed translating these images into a symphony. This

¹ "Decadent imagination" is discussed in Chapter IV. 3. i.

synthetic concept of musical theatre, fusing text, music and stage, involves another relevant aspect: the points of contact with pictorial art. The discussion of *Oceana* largely concentrated on the fact that Benco was inspired by the marine pictures of Arnold Böcklin. The opera stands as one of the rare examples of a spectacle uniting all the arts, leading from painting to text, and ultimately to opera.

One of the questions asked in examining *Oceana* was what happens when a work of figurative art becomes chosen as a basis for a story, and is brought to the operatic stage? The answer which seems to be most suitable in describing the opera is the concept of a “poetic theatre”, since both the libretto and Smareglia’s music give an impression of ‘poetry’ rather than ‘drama’. Benco’s text is outlined as a series of images, many of which correspond to Böcklin’s.² There is an episodic unfolding of the plot and numerous narrative suggestions on the drama; these are features which Italian critics described as “poetic and picturesque surpassing the dramatic”. In fact, the poet’s libretto seems to be more an evocative, “poetic fantasy” (Cameroni) than a drama meant for the operatic stage. It is interesting to note that, as well as to Böcklin, Benco’s female characters in general and the atmospheres which envelop them reveal a resemblance to the images depicted by the Pre-Raphaelites, Burne-Jones and Waterhouse in particular.³ In support of this view it is worth mentioning that the art of the Pre-Raphaelites was exhibited for the first time officially in Italy in 1895 in Venice. However, their influence on arts and literature in general in Italy had an impact in the years before 1895, and can be traced back to the works of D’Annunzio.⁴

In the case of their third opera, *Abisso*, Smareglia and Benco surprised the audiences of La Scala by dealing with an episode from Italian history. *Abisso* was seen as even more unusual because Benco placed the sensual elements of the plot in the front line: the “abyss” he evoked had little to do with the Battle of Legnano set in 13th century Italy. Instead, the theme is similar to the subjects dealt with in *Salomé*, for example, and was considered to be extremely provocative, as were D’Annunzio’s works of the period. What is interesting to note is the fact that at the time Benco was writing *Abisso* (1906), and while Smareglia was composing the opera, D’Annunzio’s theatrical works attracted more attention among Smareglia’s contemporaries, gradually infiltrating the operatic repertory. From 1906 to 1914 for example, operas involving similar subjects were Cilea’s *Gloria*, Franchetti’s *La figlia di Iorio*,

² For more on Böcklin and the images which relate to *Oceana* see Chapter V. 4. i.

³ See also the content of the influence of Burne-Jones on Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas* in Chapter V.

⁴ For more on the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites on literature and arts in Italy, see Giuliana Pieri 1998, “The Influence of English Pre-Raphaelitism in 19th Century Italian Art and Literature”, Ph. D. Thesis, University of Oxford.

Mascagni's *Isabeau* and *Parisina*, Mancinelli's *Paolo e Francesca*, or Zandonai's *Conchita* and *Francesca da Rimini*.⁵

Another novelty about *Abisso* was that, in contrast to *Falena* and *Oceana*, it had a realistic setting which involved agitated and brutal conflicts. Was there a difference in Benco's layout of the story? As indicated, despite the inclusion of violent themes, the libretto lacked effective or persuasive dramatic contrasts, and it evolved around the character's inner tension. It also provided evocative episodes. As was the case with *Oceana* and *Falena*, music was expected to provide variety in interpreting the drama.

2. How did such libretti influence Smareglia's interpretation?

The particular attention and space Benco conferred on music in his texts proved to be most stimulating for the composer. His imagination was able to unfold to the full in an all-encompassing complex of sound, producing the effect that Holloway described on experiencing *Parsifal*, "a sonorous image cluster".⁶ The originality of Smareglia's musical language is its continuous, all-involving sonority: the orchestral texture is fused with the vocal parts, creating a powerful and consistent whole. Often, the sound of his operas and the vast dimensions of some scenes in them are suggestive of symphonic poems. It was seen that what creates the rich polyphonic texture is Smareglia's symphonic development of the material, much of which is of leitmotif origin. Salvetti referred to the harmonic style of *Abisso* as "*densità armonica terribile*", alluding to the harmonic progressions involving secondary dominants, chromatic chords and non-harmony notes.

A negative consequence of Benco's concern with texts that seem to require "pure music" in opera was the pressure that was put upon the dramatic abilities of the composer. For example, in the case of *Falena*, Benco asked Smareglia to evoke its atmosphere, interpret its action *and* elaborate its drama. The result was that there are many effective episodes in the opera containing inner dramatic energy, but as a whole *Falena* seems to be "dreamily impressionistic rather than dramatic" (Budden). This unconditional attitude of Benco towards the composer in reality required Smareglia to concentrate primarily on such episodic evocation of images. The reason why there is generally a lack of dramatic fibre in Smareglia's operas is that there was

⁵ See Time line 3 and 4, Appendix C.

⁶ See Robin Holloway 1986, 'Experiencing music and imagery in *Parsifal*', in *Opera Guide Series*, 34, ed. by Nicholas John, London: John Calder.

very little dramatic content in Benco's libretti in the first place. That is not to say that Smareglia had no choice. Nevertheless, he had to rely primarily on his imagination since he was deprived of seeing his operas staged.

Perhaps Smareglia's operas can be best understood if they are looked at as being musico-dramatic works in which the priority is to evoke the story by immersing it in music. Similar concepts would be taken over by the "*generazione dell'80*", by Malipiero, for example. It seems that the special theatre which D'Annunzio thought of building, Teatro d'Albano, could have been the perfect place to perform such poetic operas, since ultimately, *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* capture the imagination of their listener. It can be seen that Benco and Smareglia aspired to a total work of art which would use music, theatre and dance (as in *Oceana*), following the example of Wagner, but implementing his concept in the atmosphere and with the themes of Decadence, more in the manner of D'Annunzio.

3. Suggestions for future research

What has this thesis contributed to the study of Smareglia's operas? The aim has been to illustrate his place in the history of opera. The emphasis is a cultural one. Because the cultural context of *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso* has proved to be so rich and multi-faceted, it has been necessary to confine the scope of the musical discussion to just a few of these features that have been judged most significant and characteristic. It does not provide a detailed music analysis of any of the three operas. It has not looked into the harmonic aspects, the orchestration, or provided a thorough study of leitmotifs, all topics that could be extensively studied.

The concept of the "*teatro di poesia*" propounded in this thesis stands as a new approach to discussing *Falena*, *Oceana* and *Abisso*. We have pointed out the manner in which the expression has been used in the late 19th-century Italian literature, and the way in which it entered the criticism on opera at the time when the two arts aspired towards each other's means (or power) of expression. Although the style of the three operas points to their obvious *poeticism*, thorough-going musical analysis of these works is needed for a comprehensive assessment and understanding. It is important to highlight that the suggestion that Smareglia and Benco wished to create a "poetic theatre", and to collaborate with D'Annunzio at some stage, is evidenced in one of the many unpublished letters. These letters contain numerous insights in need of further elucidation. For example, some letters reveal how, following *Abisso*,

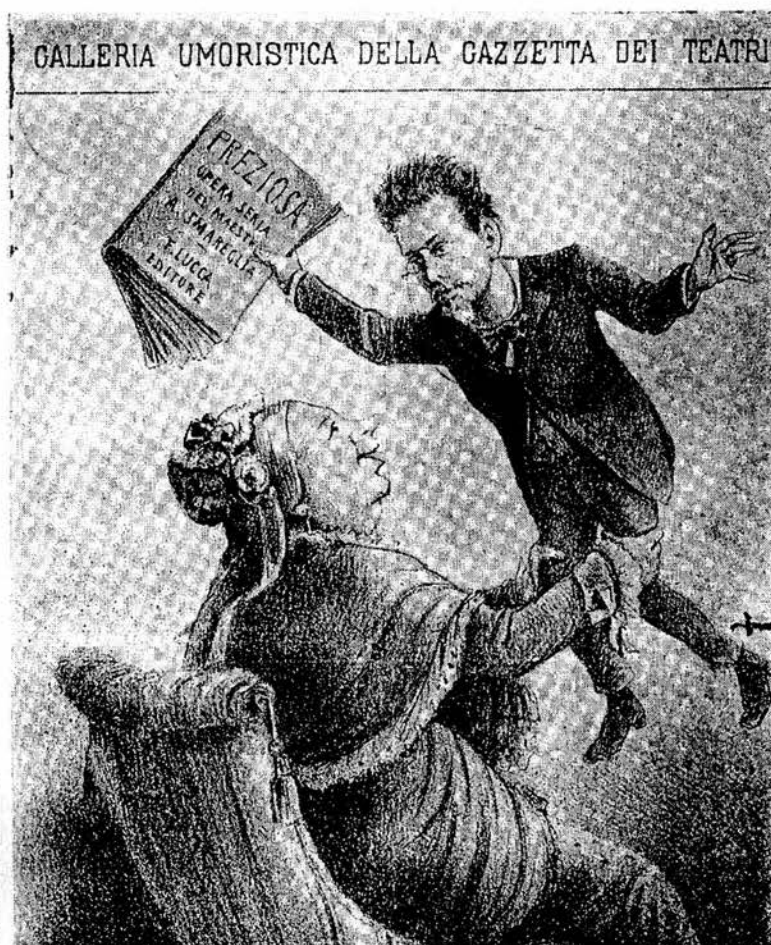
Smareglia admitted he was “exhausted of the predominant symphonism and would like to rest with the vocal part...”; he wanted another libretto with a “Slav” ambient:⁷

[S]i tratta di fare una cosa vibrante con personaggi assai staccati nel loro carattere, eventualmente con qualche elemento comico o caratteristico ecc. In una parola un’opera di forte impressione. Per popolare [intendevo] passioni e movenze psichiche che tutti siano in grado di sentire e condividere, non dunque idealità astratte o visioni poetiche, bisognerà evitare svolgimenti di azioni parallele che non risultano quasi mai, infine di limitare al più possibile le esigenze vocali e orchestrali. [letter B.C. 1253, see Appendix B]

[I would like to create something vibrant, with characters which are of a distinctive temperament, maybe with some comic element or typical etc.. In one word, a strongly impressive opera. When I said *popolare* I meant passionate, and with the kind of psychological attitudes which everyone can hear and share, not therefore abstract concepts or poetic visions; it is necessary to avoid the development of parallel actions which almost never result in the right way, in the end limit the vocal and orchestral exigencies as much as possible.]

These letters leave the impression that Smareglia’s operas, even the last three, warrant further exploration. The collection of unpublished letters seems to open up new avenues for future research of Smareglia’s correspondence, and more broadly, in respect to his overall compositional achievements. His teamwork with Benco was a special kind of collaboration in which the poet was involved in composing music. This thesis therefore contributes significantly to the study of Smareglia in an effort to encourage and expose the need for something just as important as academic research: the actual performances of these operas.

⁷ See letter B. C. 1276, Appendix B.



Consolatrix Maestrorum :

LA SIGNORA GIOVANNINA - La tua „Preziosa“ è tanto preziosa, caro Smareglia, che voglio pregarti di scrivere altri due o tre spartiti...

SMAREGLIA - Magari cento!

Illustration 17: the caricature of the publisher Giovannina Lucca planning to commission from Smareglia new operas, following the success of his *Preziosa* in Milan in 1879.

APPENDIX A – PERSONALIA

The following personalia list is intended to introduce to the reader the people one most often encounters in a study of Antonio Smareglia, and those that appear often throughout this thesis. The individuals who feature most frequently in the main biographies are those with whom Smareglia had either immediate contact, or who influenced the composer's ways of thinking and his work. Omitted are those too well known to require introduction (Puccini, Verdi or Wagner).

Except for Smareglia himself, his librettist, and, occasionally, artists such as Arnold Böcklin, or James Joyce, who are discussed in more detail and in a more appropriate section of the thesis, the list includes some of the performers who sang at the premiere of Smareglia's operas, the publishers with whom he was involved, the critics and various artists who were, at some stage in their career, his friends. Some who evidently played an important role in Smareglia's life are not referred to in the standard reference literature: personalities such as Rocco Pierobon, Carlo Sai, Gaudenzio dalla Zonca, for example, remain shadowy figures but are included here for the sake of completeness.

Bartoli, Romeo (Trieste 1875 - Milan 1936)

Smareglia and Bartoli met in Trieste in 1895, after the successful premiere of *Nozze istriane*. Bartoli was a cousin of Silvio Benco, who had in that year interrupted his study of engineering in Graz in order to study music. He became Smareglia's friend and took private singing lessons with him. For several years, Bartoli very much helped Smareglia in making fair copies of his music at the time when Smareglia's sight was deteriorating. Within a few years, Bartoli became a music teacher himself, and in 1908 was giving lessons for a short period of time to James Joyce, who in return taught him English.¹ Bartoli became the choir conductor of the Teatro Verdi and the Teatro Politeama Rossetti, and was in charge of the Triestine *Società vocale teatrale* (founded in 1907). In 1913 Bartoli set up a small chamber choir, which comprised only fifteen singers, and became the first choir of madrigalists in Trieste; *I madrigalisti triestini*. In 1920 he established a choir in Milan, *Gruppo Madrigalisti Varesini* (which D'Annunzio called *Camerata Varesina del Madrigale*), later renamed *Camerata milanese del madrigale*. He often conducted in the Triestine theatres, and in 1914 became a professor of choral singing at the Milan Conservatory.

¹ According to Crivelli (who draws his information from Elmann, *James Joyce*), Joyce sang in a concert conducted by Bartoli, in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*. Cf. Crivelli, *Itinerari Triestini: James Joyce*, p. 84.

Bellincioni, Gemma (Como 1864 - Naples 1950)

Celebrated Italian soprano, taught by her father, who was a professional bass. She studied in Milan with the tenor Roberto Stagno, a famous singer at the time, who became her husband in 1886. She was much admired by Verdi as Violetta in *Traviata*, and was originally Puccini's first choice for the role of *Mimi*, for which she was unavailable at that time. After her appearance as *Santuzza* at the premiere of *Cavalleria rusticana* (Rome 1890), she gained a particular reputation for her performances in many *verismo* operas. Such examples were Giordano's *Mala vita* (Rome 1892), *Fedora* (Milan 1898) and Smareglia's *Nozze istriane* (Trieste 1895). She was also the first Italian *Salome* (at its premiere) in Turin in 1906, in the performance conducted by Strauss himself, and she frequently sang the parts of *Tosca*, and *Carmen*.

Benco, Anna Gruber (Trieste 1929 – Duino 2000)

Daughter of Aurelia Gruber Benco; the granddaughter of Silvio Benco. In contrast to her mother Aurelia, since childhood Anna had revealed her passion and gift for arts. She admitted that she had “inherited (perhaps ‘badly’) all she could from such a family: poetry, theatre, musicality”.² Her goal of becoming a film director became possible when, as a very young student, she won a scholarship to the Film Academy in Rome. She won the first prize for directing a film entitled *Calze in seta*. Anna collaborated with most famous Italian film directors (such as Fellini, Antonioni, Soldati and De Sica). Her desire to teach “how to express ones own personal thoughts in words and gestures that can be seen”, led her to open a school for theatre in Rome, which following a serious illness she later transferred to Trieste. She continued to stimulate various artistic activities in her home town of Duino, and founded *L'Associazione delle arti e dei mestieri* and *L'Associazione culturale duinese per trainare l'arte e la poesia*.³

During her life Anna was curator of the most valuable of her grandfather's possessions. In the last years of her life she was writing a biography of Benco, which is still under the protection of the rest of Benco's family, and is to be donated, along with other documentation and materials of a different nature, to the Biblioteca Civica “A. Hortis” in Trieste. As Anna said herself, the biography gives an account of various, lesser known episodes of Benco's life and at the same time provides an insight into critical reassessments of Benco's work, comments which are supposed to shed a new light on Benco as a writer.³

² The information derives from an interview with Anna Gruber Benco held in Duino in May 1997.

³ Unfortunately, Anna's biography of Silvio Benco was unavailable at the time of this research.

Benco, Aurelia Gruber (Trieste 1905 - 1995)

Daughter of Silvio Benco and Delia de Zuccoli. Although she chose a different career unrelated to the literary world of her parents (in 1929 she graduated in agriculture in Perugia), she inherited much of the intellectual strength of the Benco family. Upon her death, at the age of ninety, the citizens of Trieste held her in their memory just as they did her father Silvio, as one of the most important and emotive personalities of their town: Aurelia was “one of the strongest female personalities of her time: a woman committed in a political, cultural, and civic sense...” (Gabriella Ziani, *Il Piccolo*, 23 September 1995).

During her life Aurelia was active both politically and culturally. She left several articles which contain most vivid memories of her parents and of her encounter with James Joyce. From 1951 to 1973 she revived the journal *Umana, Rivista di politica e di cultura*, which was originally founded by her father in 1918, and which she organised (in 1986) as a special issue, an anthology compiled of previous outstanding articles. She was married to Carlo Gruber, and had two daughters, Marta and Anna.

Benco, Delia - wife of Silvio Benco. See under Zuccoli, Delia de

Boito, Arrigo (Padua 1842 - Milan 1918)

Italian poet, composer and critic. Boito is best remembered as the collaborator of Giuseppe Verdi, having written the librettos for *Otello* (Milan 1887) and *Falstaff* (Milan 1893), and revised Piave's libretto for *Simon Boccanegra* (rev. Milan 1881). Boito came to Milan in 1853 to study composition with Alberto Mazzucato at the Milan Conservatory. His first patriotic cantatas (*Il quattro giugno* and *Le sorelle d'Italia*), written in the 1860s with Franco Faccio, as well as his notorious ode *All'arte italiana* from 1863, announced their rebellious spirit and a determination to renew Italian art. While contemplating ‘the music of the future’, he and Faccio became the leaders of the *scapigliati*. It was within this iconoclastic group of artists that Smareglia first met Boito when he arrived in Milan in 1870. Boito was, at the time, very affected by the failure of his *Mefistofele* at its premiere at La Scala in 1868. According to Mario Smareglia, Smareglia first visited Boito (in 1870), when he went to borrow the score of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* for his teacher, Franco Faccio. The sixteen year-old Smareglia was admitted to Boito's house, only after he had expressed his enthusiasm to hear the music of Bach! (also in Conati 1994: xxxiii).

During Smareglia's formative years in Milan, Boito and Smareglia became very close friends. Sharing a passion for the music of German masters, they discussed and played their own music

to one another.⁴ This was also the case with Boito's unfinished opera *Nerone*. As seen in a letter sent to Boito in 1912, Smareglia greatly admired Boito's ideas and work, in particular his opera *Nerone*, and was to write about it after Boito had died in 1918.⁵ Following Boito's death, Toscanini and Smareglia worked on the completion of the score. Their collaboration ended after the first act, and the rest of the score was completed by Toscanini and Vincenzo Tommasini.⁶ Boito remained faithful to Smareglia's work and a personal friend throughout his life. He helped him with the stage rehearsals of *Oceana* and *Abisso* (at La Scala in 1903 and 1914), because by then Smareglia was blind.

D'Annunzio, Gabriele (Pescara 1863 - Gardone Riviera 1938)

Italian writer, the leading figure of Italian decadence. His strong influence on the arts in Italy and France at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century has been described as "*estetismo d'annunziano*" (Tedeschi). D'Annunzio's particular attachment and sensibility to music, and the importance he attributed to it, impregnated his writings. He directly collaborated with composers such as Debussy (*Le martyre de St Sebastien*, Paris 1911), and Pizzetti (*La pisanella, ou la mort parfumée*, Paris 1913 and *La Nave*, 1908) when he commissioned from them incidental music which was to be an integral part of his drama. Among D'Annunzio's other plays which were adapted as opera librettos were *La figlia di Iorio* (Franchetti 1906, and Pizzetti 1954), *Parisina* (Mascagni 1913), *Francesca da Rimini* (Zandonai 1914), *Fedra* (Pizzetti 1915).

The themes which D'Annunzio chose in his writings influenced many Italian artists of the time, including Benco. The two artists met in 1902, and developed a close friendship; several letters are preserved which reveal that D'Annunzio highly respected Benco. D'Annunzio helped Benco to publish his novel *La fiamma fredda* with the Milan publisher Treves. During that time Benco introduced the poet to Smareglia; several letters (from D'Annunzio to Treves or to Benco) mention that he attended the premiere of *Oceana*, and he admired and praised the work afterwards as "enchanting texture of sounds" (*incantevole tessuto dei suoni*). From the unpublished part of Smareglia's correspondence we learn that the composer and Benco planned to collaborate at some stage with D'Annunzio, creating a new work to be staged at his special Teatro d'Albano, near Rome.⁷

⁴ A letter (sent from Boito to Smareglia on 3 January 1912), which confirms that they continued to communicate and discuss their work together, can be found among the materials in the Civico Museo Teatrale "Carlo Schmidl" (gift from Adua Rigotti Smareglia).

⁵ The article is quoted in Mario Smareglia, Antonio Smareglia.

⁶ Cf. Chapter II.

⁷ For more on that letter see Chapter I. 2 and Appendix B. Several letters written by D'Annunzio to Benco are kept in the Biblioteca Civica in Trieste, while D'Annunzio's letters addressed to Treves, in which he mentioned Benco, or the premiere of *Oceana*, can be found in Gianni Oliva ed., *Gabriele D'Annunzio: lettere ai Treves*.

Dominicetti, Cesare (Desenzano del Garda 1821 - Sesto S. Giovanni 1888)

Italian composer, studied in Milan. After the occasional and moderate success of his first few operas, such as *I begli usi di città* (Desenzano 1841), *Due moglie in una* (Milan 1853), *La Maschera* (Milan 1854), he went to South America with a travelling opera company as its conductor for some time. He returned to Milan in the 1870s and started to compose operas again, but without any major results, except for the “*dramma fantastico*”, *Lago delle fate* (Milan 1878). Dominicetti was much respected by the young generation of composers around Boito, including Smareglia. He was a professor of composition at the Milan Conservatory from 1881 until his death. As we learn from various sources on Smareglia, Dominicetti was a talented orchestrator, and was often approached by Smareglia for advice during his years of study. In 1874, Boito wrote a libretto for Dominicetti's opera *Iram* (which remained unperformed), while simultaneously working on a revision of *Mefistofele*. This fact could support the contemporary rumour about Dominicetti helping Boito with the orchestration of the revised *Mefistofele* (rev. Bologna 1875).

Faccio, Franco (Verona 1840 - Monza, 1891)

Italian composer and an outstanding Italian conductor at the time. He was Smareglia's teacher, first privately for a year and then at the Milan Conservatory from 1872 until 1877. Faccio first came to the Milan Conservatory in 1855 to study composition with Stefano Ronchetti-Monteviti. There, he met his life-long friend Arrigo Boito, with whom he was to gain a reputation as a *scapigliato* musician. After the *succès d'estime* of his operas *I profughi fiamminghi* (Milan 1863) and *Amleto* (Genoa 1865), he renounced composing and turned exclusively to conducting. In 1878 he accompanied the orchestra of La Scala to the International Exhibition in Paris, to conduct five concerts. The repertoire, entitled “Young Italian art”, included “i grandi italiani scomparsi: Boccherini, Rossini, Cimarosa, Donizetti, Paganini, Tartini” (Favetta 1961: 5) as well as the contemporary Italian composers. Among the compositions of Verdi and Ponchielli, Faccio chose two students' works: Smareglia's symphonic poem *Leonora*, and the symphonic prologue *La falce* by Catalani.⁸ He taught at the Milan Conservatory from 1868 until 1878, and in 1879, when the “Società orchestrale della Scala” was formed, he became its director, promoting the performance of instrumental music in Italy.

During his tenure as a principal director at La Scala (1869 - 1889), Faccio conducted numerous Italian operatic premieres, such as the European premiere of Verdi's *Aida* (1872), *Don Carlos*

⁸ An edition of Smareglia's *Leonora* (a gift from Adua Smareglia) can be found in Trieste in the Civico Museo Teatrale “Carlo Schmidl”. Published in Milan by Francesco Lucca, the copy bears the inscription and signature of Smareglia: “Al mio amico F. Faccio”.

(4 act version, 1884), *Simon Boccanegra* (rev. 1881), *Otello* (1887); Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* (1876), Catalani's *Dejanice* (1883); Massenet's *Herodiade* (1882), and many others. Faccio was a fervent supporter of Wagner's operas, and had conducted *Lohengrin* in the famous premiere in Milan in 1873, on which occasion Smareglia's enthusiasm for Wagner ended up in a fight with an anti-Wagnerian.⁹

Ferrari, Rodolfo (Modena 1865 - Rome 1919)

Italian conductor, studied in Bologna, graduating in composition under Alessandro Busi in 1882. He conducted Smareglia's operas *Falena* (Trieste 1899 and 1912) and *Cornill Schut* (Trieste 1900), as well as the premieres of several operas written at the time, among them Mascagni's *L'Amico Fritz* (Rome, 1891), *Le Maschere* (Turin, 1901), Giordano's *Andrea Chenier* (Milan, 1896), and Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (Milan 1893).

Filippi, Filippo (Vicenza 1830 - Milan 1887)

Italian lawyer and music critic. Although he graduated in law in Padua in 1853, Filippi privately studied piano and organ, turning to music criticism in 1851. In 1859 he was offered a job at the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* by Tito Ricordi. After 1862, he collaborated with *La Perseveranza*, a Milanese periodical, in which he wrote several reviews of Smareglia's early works, such as on *Leonora, sinfonia descrittiva*, and on the operas *Caccia lontana* (Milan 1875), *Preziosa* (Milan 1879) and *Bianca da Cervia* (Milan 1882). Even though he claimed that Smareglia was greatly influenced by Verdi, Filippi praised the composer's originality, the rich orchestral texture and the expressive melodiosity in his operas, judging Smareglia as a composer of great promise.

While travelling around Germany in 1860s, Filippi heard Wagner's music and wrote a series of articles about it, which were published in *La Perseveranza* in 1870 (also in a separate edition, in *Musica e musicisti. Critiche, biografie ed escursioni*, Milan 1876). Although he was a great admirer of Verdi, in his critical writings he encouraged the increasing German influence on Italian music.

Franchi - Verney Giuseppe Ippolito (Turin 1848 - Rome 1921)

Italian music critic and composer. Besides writing for the Turin journals *La Gazzetta del popolo* and *Risorgimento*, he wrote a review of Smareglia's *Falena*, which was published in the periodical *La Nuova Antologia*. He is frequently mentioned by both Benco and Smareglia,

⁹ According to Ariberto Smareglia, Smareglia had a fight with a piano teacher, Francesco Giarde (cf. Ariberto Smareglia, *Vita ed arte*.)

although in a most non-informative way, from which we may only infer that he was Smareglia's friend.

Gavazzeni, Gianandrea (Bergamo 1909 - 1996)

Italian conductor, composer, critic and writer. He studied composition at the Milan Conservatory with Ildebrando Pizzetti, but dedicated his career to conducting, in particularly the operas of the 19th and 20th centuries. He contributed to the revival of the music of many composers of the "young Italian school", among them of Smareglia, conducting the most recent performance of *Falena* in 1975 in Trieste.

Gialdini, Gialdino (Pescia 1843 - 1919)

Italian conductor and composer, the pupil of Teodulo Mabellini in Florence. From 1904 to 1915 he was the director of the Trieste Conservatory. Gialdini conducted the premiere of *Falena* at the Teatro Rossini in Venice in 1897, and the performance of *Nozze istriane* in 1908 in Pola.

Guarnieri, Antonio (Venice 1880 - Milan 1952)

Italian composer, conductor and violoncellist. After a brief career as violoncellist, he became more oriented towards conducting. Although nominated as the artistic director of Italian opera in Vienna for the period from 1906 - 1912, he left the position after only a year because of disputes. In 1908 he worked in Buenos Aires with Luigi Mancinelli, and later returned to Florence (conducting the Italian premiere of *Parsifal* in Florence 1914 - 15) and in Milan (*Lohengrin* 1922). Guarnieri conducted the operas of Catalani, Zandonai and Smareglia's *Abisso* in 1926 in Trieste.

Illica, Luigi (Piacenza 1857 - 1919)

Italian librettist. Smareglia and Illica met in Milan in the 1870s, when both of them were at the start of their careers. *Il Vassallo di Szigeth* (1889) was, in fact, the first libretto Illica wrote. After another collaboration (on the opera *Cornill Schut* 1893), they spent some time in Istria, in order to work on Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, their next operatic project. Illica was inspired by the atmosphere and customs of the little village of Dignano, and soon persuaded Smareglia to produce a more realistic drama in the *verismo* style which was in fashion at the time. The result was *Nozze istriane*, Smareglia's most popular work. Although this was their last collaboration, Smareglia and Illica continued to communicate; a small

sample of it can be found in the published part of Smareglia's correspondence.¹⁰ Around 1900, Illica made an effort to improve the relationship between Smareglia and Casa Musicale Ricordi, but with no success. Similarly, he tried to negotiate with the publisher Sonzogno, but this time Smareglia refused the contract, because it was to cover a 10-year period, which the composer considered "too long".

Illica's career is best known through his collaboration with Giacosa in producing the libretti for Puccini's *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*. He wrote numerous libretti for other composers of the "young Italian school", among them for Catalani (*La Wally* 1892), Franchetti (*Cristoforo Colombo* 1892, and *Germania* 1902), Giordano (*Andrea Chenier* 1896), and Mascagni (*Iris* 1898, *Le maschere* 1901, *Isabeau* 1911).

Joyce, James (Rathgar, Dublin 1882 - Zürich 1941)

Irish writer who lived in Trieste from 1904 to 1915 and 1919 to 1920. Joyce is discussed in chapters II and III.

Lehár, Franz (Komaron 1870 - Bad Ischl 1948)

Austrian composer of Hungarian descent. He studied in Prague with Zdenek Fibich and Josef Foerster. After a brief experience of conducting and composing for a military bands in Pola and Trieste, he achieved international fame as a composer of operettas. Smareglia met Lehár in Pola in the 1890s, when Lehár was appointed as the military bandmaster of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial and Royal Navy. The composer encouraged the young Lehár, introducing him to the scores of Wagner, and teaching him orchestration while Lehár was working on his operetta *Kukuscha*. In fact, in this work, there are some echoes of Smareglia's *Cornill Schut* (Dresden 1893), an opera which Lehár admired (Grun 1970). Lehár remained Smareglia's friend during his residence in Vienna, and in 1908 helped Smareglia in organising the performance of *Nozze istriane* at Vienna's Volksoper Theatre.

Lucca, Francesco (Cremona 1802 - Milan 1872)

Italian music publisher, who started off as an apprentice music engraver at Giulio Ricordi's firm. After having spent three years abroad specialising in the new lithographic technique, in the mid 1820s, Lucca opened his own engraving workshop. He worked in Ricordi's copying department again in 1841, gradually acquiring the rights of reproduction for two operas by Donizetti, *Adelia* (1839) and *La favorita* (1841). He also commissioned Verdi's *Atilla* (Venice

¹⁰ The most important part of the correspondence between Smareglia and Illica has been unavailable for years. The existing letters, however, were recently 'returned' to the Biblioteca Civica in Piacenza [information available from conversation with the Triestine musicologist dott. Gianni Gori]. The transcription and analysis of these letters is one of many tasks waiting to be done.

1846) and *Il corsaro* (Trieste 1848). Although Verdi soon moved under Ricordi's wing, Lucca became a true rival to Ricordi's company, having in his catalogue Weber's *Der Freischütz* as well as operas by Mercadante, Pacini, Gomez, Marchetti and Catalani.

Lucca's success as a music publisher was magnified when his wife, **Giovannina Strazza** (1814 - 1894), became involved in the business. Her best coup was in 1868, when she acquired the exclusive rights of Wagner's music in Italy, having already done the same with Gounod's *Faust*, Halevy's *La Juive* and Meyerbeer's *L'africane*. This expansion of Lucca's firm led Ricordi to buy it. This event took place in May 1888, and led many composers of the "young Italian school", in particularly Catalani and Smareglia, to be completely neglected by Ricordi.

Giovannina Lucca was Smareglia's first publisher. They had met in Milan in 1879, when a very successful performance of Smareglia's *Preziosa* took place in the Teatro del Verme. This event remained memorable in the history of Italian opera: the humourists of *Galleria Umoristica della Gazzetta dei Teatri* depicted a caricature of Giovannina grasping Smareglia (with his new score) as her new talent for the flourishing of her publishing business. She then commissioned another opera by Smareglia, *Bianca di Cervia* (Milan 1882). See **Illustration n. 17**.

Gian Francesco Malipiero (Venice 1882 – Treviso 1973)

Italian composer and musicologist, considered as one of the most original Italian composers of the early 20th century. Born into a musicians family, Malipiero spent several years with his father (who was a pianist and conductor) in Trieste, Berlin and Vienna. Following his brief study (from 1898 to 1899) at the Vienna Conservatory, he returned to Venice in 1899 and begun studying counterpoint with the organist – composer, Marco Enrico Bossi, in the Liceo Musicale, however, soon interrupting the course. Malipiero continued to study composition on his own and in the meantime had discovered the neglected music of Italian past, in the Biblioteca Marciana, where he transcribed Monteverdi, Frescobaldi and Merulo.

Malipiero finally earned Bossi's approval and a diploma in Bologna in 1904. In 1905 he acted as an amanuensis to Smareglia while the composer resided in Achile Tamburlini's house. The encounter and friendship with Smareglia was significant for Malipiero's career, and it is known that Malipiero claimed "to have learnt (especially about the orchestration) while taking down elaborately scored music" (Waterhouse 1999: 10) more from this experience than from his previous studies with Bossi.¹¹ Malipiero also collaborated with Benco, who wrote the libretti for his operas *Elen e Fuldano* (1907-9) and *Canossa* (1911-12).

¹¹ Waterhouse mentions that the contacts with Smareglia deepened Malipiero's understanding of Wagner and in developing his skills in orchestration, see Waterhouse, *Gian Francesco Malipiero*, p. 10, 92.

Although there is little documentation left which tells us more about the relationship between Malipiero and Smareglia (for example, about Malipiero being Smareglia's pupil, as Ariberto Smareglia stated in his monograph), there is a letter, written by Malipiero in Vienna in 1907, addressed to Benco, which reveals that Malipiero was staying with Smareglia in Vienna, and was reporting Benco on the progress of the events (such as the performance of *Nozze istriane*, and of the overture of *Oceana*). Malipiero's letter and telegram are kept in the Biblioteca Civica in Trieste.

Manzutto, Gian Giacomo (Umago, Istria 1861 - ?)

The principal music critic of the irredentistic journal *L'Indipendente*, for which Benco wrote (from 1890 to 1901). It was in his house that Benco and Smareglia met in 1894. The information which we can gather from Benco's *Ricordi* and Smareglia's biographies is that Manzutto, along with his brother Piero, was Smareglia's friend for many years, assisting him (financially and morally) throughout the composer's career.¹² In fact, it was he and Rocco Pierobon who persuaded Benco to write his first libretto for Smareglia.

Although a graduate in law, Manzutto studied music in several towns: in Vienna with Bruckner, in Bologna with Alessandro Busi, and in Trieste with Smareglia, Manzutto devoted forty years of his career to journalism. He established himself in particular as a music critic for *L'Indipendente*, where he was writing for 25 years. He is remembered in the history of music in Trieste, along his younger colleague Silvio Benco, for defending the music of Wagner, which was performed in Trieste in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. It had been criticised by the older generation, in particular at the time that Wagner's later operas first reached the city, for example *Die Walküre* (1893) and *Tristan und Isolde* (1899). Manzutto wrote for other newspapers such as *La Nazione*, *Era Nuova* and *Il Popolo di Trieste*. During the First World War he was a director of the Conservatorio Musicale Giuseppe Verdi in Trieste, taking the place of the conductor Gialdino Gialdini.

Pierobon, Rocco

He was a school teacher from Piran, in Istria, who is often, but vaguely, mentioned in Smareglia's correspondence and biographies. Benco recalled him as 'Smareglia's best friend', who regularly visited the composer around the time when he started to lose his sight, informing him of the local, political and cultural news of the day. Pierobon continuously helped to promote Smareglia's music by stimulating him to work, and possibly it was he and Manzutto

¹² In the Archive of the Civico Museo Teatrale "Carlo Schmidl" in Trieste, among the materials belonging to 'Dono Elisa Tamburlini', there are numerous letters sent to Smareglia (at the time he lived in Venice) from Pietro Manzutto, a famous wealthy industrialist from Istria. The letters were sent around 1900, from the Distilleria a vapore in Umago (Istria).

who might have persuaded Benco, in 1896, to start collaborating with Smareglia (Benco 1968: 57).¹³

Pozza, Giovanni (1852 - 1914) and Francesco (1855 - 1921)

Smareglia met the brothers Pozza when he first arrived in Milan in the 1870s. Giovanni, a theatre and music critic, became his close friend, and wrote in 1875 the text for Smareglia's student work, the "*bozzetto musicale*" *Caccia lontana*, as well as a few critical reviews of his operas, published in the Milanese journal *Il Corriere della Sera*. It is not clear if it was Giovanni or his brother Francesco (who was a tenor) who wrote the libretto of *Bianca da Cervia* (Milan 1882) for Smareglia; although it seems sensible to believe that it was Francesco, since it was he who collaborated with Illica in writing the libretto of *Il Vassallo di Szigeth* (Vienna 1889). The brothers Pozza, as mentioned in Ariberto Smareglia's biography, were Smareglia's close friends while he lived in Milan.

Richter, Hans (Gyor 1843 - Bayreuth 1916)

Austro-Hungarian conductor. After having gained some musical training from his parents, in 1860 he went to the Vienna Conservatory to study piano, horn and violin, but had soon managed to learn how to play all the instruments except the harp. He soon became assistant as copyist, *repetiteur* and chorus master to Wagner, for the premiere of *Die Meistersinger* in Munich in 1868, and he conducted the premiere of the *Ring* at the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876. Gradually, Richter became one of the most respected conductors of his time, engaged in the major musical centres in Europe, such as Budapest, Vienna, Bayreuth and London.

Smareglia met Hans Richter in Vienna during 1888 and 1889, the time which Christopher Fifield described as the conductor's "busiest year of his life". Richter was simultaneously engaged with many musical posts all over Europe, and during the two-year period in Vienna (1888 to 1900), he introduced a whole series of new works and new composers, among whom was also Smareglia. As recalled in his biographies, in 1889 Smareglia went to the Hofoper in Vienna for an audition set by the director Wilhelm Jahn. It was on this occasion that Smareglia's opera *Il Vasallo di Szigeth* (*Der Vasall von Szigeth*) was chosen for performance, and it was conducted with great success later on in the same year by Hans Richter himself. In 1894 Richter also conducted Smareglia's next opera, *Cornill Schut*. The two artists met again in Venice in 1901, while Richter was on a tour in Italy. As we learn from Ariberto Smareglia's biography, on this occasion Richter had encouraged Smareglia, who was working on *Oceana*

¹³ It seems sensible to believe that among the numerous letters which remain unpublished there are more letters which belong to Pierobon. Further research needs to be pursued with the materials of the Civico Museo Teatrale "Carlo Schmidl" in Trieste, which can be found under the name "Dono Elisa Tamburlini", "Dono Maria Sai", as well as other parts of the archive where there is documentation on Smareglia.

at the time, to write a symphonic poem. The result of this was the *Oceana* suite, which Smareglia dedicated to the great conductor.

Ricordi

Italian firm of music publishers, founded in Milan in 1808 by **Giovanni Ricordi** (1785 - 1853). From working in a small copying establishment, Ricordi's employment soon became the publisher to the Milan Conservatory in 1811, and by 1814 the exclusive prompter and copyist of La Scala. By 1825 he had bought the material of La Scala's musical archive, and made similar contracts with the opera houses in Venice and Naples.

Under the management of his son, **Tito Ricordi** (1811 - 1888), who was himself a good pianist, new printing methods were introduced, along with the opening of several new branches, such as in London in 1875, and in Paris in 1888. The expansion of the business was achieved by taking over several firms, including in 1888 its main competitor, the firm Lucca.

Tito's son **Giulio Ricordi** (1840 - 1912) took over the management of the firm shortly before his father's death. Although his aptitude for music was shown in his compositions (among which is the comic opera *La secchia rapita*, Turin 1910), he was also inspired in his decision to support the operas of Verdi and in particular the whole career of Puccini. Gradually, Ricordi opened new branches in Leipzig (1901) and New York (1911), as well as acquiring a few other firms, among them the Trieste publisher C. Schmidl and Co. (1902).

After Giulio's death in 1912, his son **Tito Ricordi** (jr.) (1865 - 1933) took over the management. Although he was talented as a producer, in his negotiations with the artists Tito was regarded as 'impulsive, short-tempered, intransigent and dictatorial', as described by Mosco Carner. Unlike his father, Tito managed to spoil the relationship with Puccini (by not showing up at the Vienna production of *La fanciulla del West* in 1913) which caused the opera *La rondine* (Monte Carlo 1917) to be published by Sonzogno. Ricordi's catalogue, which in 1814 contained 176 publications, has expanded over the years in such a way that by the end of the nineteenth century, the firm owned the exclusive rights of works which dominated the operatic scenes in Italy and abroad. Unfortunately, the Ricordi family often used their power to manipulate the repertoires of the theatres, and had no compassion for the composers from whom they could not sense a commercial profit. Much as he supported Puccini's career, Giulio Ricordi harmed Catalani's and Smareglia's.

The conflict which arose between Giulio Ricordi and Smareglia had greatly damaged Smareglia's career because of the obvious power the publisher had in the sphere of opera performances at the time. The grounds for their dispute are still unclear. As a proud Wagnerian, Smareglia opposed Giulio at the beginning of his career. Nevertheless, rumours of the time pointed to Giulio's more personal reasons for the intentional withdrawal of

Smareglia's operas from Ricordi's catalogue (*Preziosa*, Milan 1879 and *Bianca di Cervia*, Milan 1882, were taken over from the firm Lucca). An excerpt from a critical review written by Giulio Ricordi himself for the firm's journal *La Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, illustrates the tone with which this influential publisher wrote about the composer:

Quando vidi annunciata un'opera del maestro Smareglia, mi venne la pelle d'oca!... Poichè lo Smareglia per chi non lo sa, è terribile spregiatore della scuola italiana, così che, a suo dire, si vergognerebbe di mettere il proprio nome sotto le più splendide pagine dei più celebri nostri compositori! (from Mario Smareglia, *Antonio Smareglia*, p. 125).

Rietti, Arturo (Trieste 1863 – Padua 1943)

One of the most important Italian painters from Trieste in the early 20th century, whom Smareglia met in Trieste. His portrait of Smareglia (the original is preserved in the Civico Museo Teatrale "Carlo Schmidl") was used by Benco on the cover of his *Ricordi di Antonio Smareglia*.

Sai(z), Carlo

One of the leading and wealthiest Triestine industrialists in the first half of the twentieth century. Smareglia was very fortunate to have met Sai in Trieste in the 1920s, because this business man resolved most of his financial difficulties at the time. Sai's determination to help Smareglia and his art was perhaps prompted by the fact that during those years, a strong campaign was launched against the composer by the *irredentisti*, greatly harming his popularity. Sai promoted the productions of Smareglia's operas in Trieste, and set up a publishing house, the Casa Musicale Giuliana, in order to issue Smareglia's scores. The firm had its own journal called *Cronache d'arte*, and each month added a special supplement *Cronache Smaregliane*, a series of reviews dedicated to Smareglia. The activity of this firm ceased in the late 1930s.

Between 1954 and 1959 the wife of Carlo Sai, Maria Sai, donated the materials regarding Smareglia to the Civico Museo Teatrale "Carlo Schmidl". Among the documentation there are numerous letters, photographs, collected critical reviews, manuscripts of Benco's libretti (such as *Abisso*).¹⁴

¹⁴ For a more complete description of Maria Sai's gift, see Favetta 1961, *Preziosi autografi al Museo Teatrale triestino*. Trieste, pp. 14-15.

Schmidl, Carlo (Trieste 1859 – Trieste 1943)

Italian music publisher and writer on music. He studied violin and music theory with his father, who was a composer and conductor of Hungarian descent. After leaving school, at the age of thirteen, he started an apprenticeship at the firm "Fondaco di Musica Vicentini". In 1889 he founded his own music establishment C. Schmidl and Co., and in the course of the same year took over the Fondaco Vicentini.

In 1902 his firm was bought by Ricordi (a detail which curiously, C. Schmidl omits in his own *Dizionario Universale*). However, Schmidl's entrepreneurial activity in music publishing did not stop. He took over several other music firms, such as Mozarthaus from Vienna (1903). Furthermore, from 1901 to 1906 Schmidl was in charge of running Ricordi's branch in Leipzig.

He played an active role in musical life in Trieste by organising various concerts, in particular of chamber music. He published a considerable amount of early music as well as contemporary music (such as Respighi and Busoni for example), including Smareglia's. His wide interests in the arts led to extensive research and writings on music, and resulted in Schmidl publishing *Il Dizionario Universale dei Musicisti* (first edition in Milan 1887-9, second edition in 1926, and supplement in 1938). Over the fifty-year period of his activity as a music publisher, Schmidl gathered an invaluable collection which includes old instruments, paintings, illustrations, manifestos, photographs, books, letters and, particularly precious, hundreds of autographs. In 1922 he gave his collection to the *Museo Teatrale Giuseppe Verdi* in Trieste, of which he was a curator from 1924 until his death. Along with the Archive of the Teatro Giuseppe Verdi, as well as the archives of other Triestine theatres or music societies, Schmidl's patrimony forms a part of what is nowadays called the *Civico Museo Teatrale di Fondazione Carlo Schmidl*, the museum which is regarded as next to the Teatro alla Scala di Milano, the richest in Italy.

A substantial amount of documentation and materials belonging to Smareglia are held in Civico Museo Teatrale "Carlo Schmidl". While some belong to the materials collected by Schmidl himself, various documentation can be found as a part of different 'gifts' made to the archive following Schmidl's death in 1943. These include, among others, gifts from members of the families which were part of Smareglia's circle, such as "Dono Elisa Tamburlini", "Dono Segrè", "Dono Silvano Smareglia", "Dono Adua Smareglia", "Dono Teodoro Costantini", and "Dono Maria Sai". The materials are not systematized or catalogued individually, but are kept as separate collections of materials, each of a different nature.

Among these 'gifts', particularly rich the "Dono Elisa Tamburlini" and the "Dono Maria Sai", the latter including Smareglia's hat, a bust of the composer done by Paul Troubetzkoy, original manifestos, programs and designs done for *Oceana's* premiere in 1903, original manuscripts of

Benco's libretti (such as of *Abisso*), numerous letters which were dictated by Smareglia and bear his signature (only some of which were published in the edition of 1974), letters written by Benco, Manzutto, Schmidl, Smareglia's wife, as well as the original postcard and a letter written by Romain Rolland (dated 22 November 1932 and 9 January 1933 respectively).

"Dono Elisa Tamburlini" includes numerous letters which were written to Smareglia while he lived in Achille Tamburlini's house. Among these are the letters written by Ariberto Smareglia, Pierobon, Giulia Smareglia, Pietro Manzutto, Smareglia's lawyer Giorgio de Basseggio, Smareglia's wife, Hugo Tomicich, as well as the typescript of Hugo Tomicich's monograph of Smareglia, entitled *Der Grosse Einsame zum 100 Geburtstag und 25 Todestage des Opernkomponisten Antonio Smareglia*. It must be stressed that the documentation of various 'gifts', although kept in separate envelopes, can be found mixed in the same box. Furthermore, since the materials are not catalogued it is hard to know what each of the collection contains.

Sonzogno

Italian publishing firm, founded at the end of the eighteenth century by Giovanni Battista Sonzogno. By 1861 the family business specialised in music publishing with **Edoardo Sonzogno** (1836 - 1920), and became Ricordi's strongest rival after Lucca's disappearance. In 1881 the firm began to issue the periodical *Il teatro illustrato*, and in 1882 the monthly *La musica popolare*. It was the journal *Il teatro illustrato* which, in 1883, introduced the Sonzogno Competition for a one-act opera, with the purpose of encouraging the writing of Italian operas. When in 1889 Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* won the competition, the firm continued to support the composers of the "young Italian school" such as Giordano, Leoncavallo, Cilea, Franchetti, Wolf-Ferrari. From 1909 the company was managed by both Riccardo (1871 - 1915) and Lorenzo Sonzogno (1877 - 1920), the two family members who were in a dispute, and decided to run their business separately. In the end, Lorenzo reunited the two firms in 1915 under the name of the Casa Musicale Sonzogno Soc.

In 1923, Sonzogno was bought by the industrialist Piero Ostali (1877 - 1961), and since then has been run by his family. Over the years they continued to enrich the existing catalogue, taking particular care over composers whose works remained neglected, such as Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*, Giordano's *La cena delle beffe*, and *Il Re*.

Among the new composers taken on the firm after 1924 was Antonio Smareglia. As seen from his letters, in 1912 Smareglia tried to negotiate a contract with Riccardo Sonzogno, with help from his friend Luigi Illica, but the contract was not concluded. Another occasion offered itself in 1924, between Sonzogno's new director and Smareglia's son Ariberto. It was during that period that Smareglia asked Sonzogno to erase his previous dedication of *Abisso* to Toscanini.

Such a dedication had been printed on the first page of the orchestral score published in 1913 in Vienna by the publisher Josef Eberle. Smareglia's contract with Sonzogno ended in 1928, probably because at that time his Triestine friend, Carlo Sai, was about to open a publishing house, called Casa musicale Giuliana, which would take care of all Smareglia's operas, except for *Preziosa* and *Bianca da Cervia*, which belonged to Ricordi.

In 1975, Smareglia's grandchildren, Adua and Silvano Smareglia, decided to deposit the preserved inheritance with Casa Sonzogno. The poor condition of the material meant that it was regarded by the firm as "useless" (*inservibile*). Attempts to publish the vocal and orchestral scores of several of his operas have not yet been successful.

Stagno, Roberto (Palermo 1840 - 1897)

Italian tenor, married to the famous soprano Gemma Bellincioni, with whom he performed in numerous *verismo* operas. He created the role of *Lorenzo* in the premiere of Smareglia's *Nozze istriane*.

Tamburlini, Achille (Trieste 1873 - ?)

Venetian sculptor, painter and designer, who studied in Milan and Munich. He was a friend of Smareglia in whose house Smareglia lived while in Venice (1901-3?). Most of the preserved letters (in the archives of Civico Museo teatrale "Carlo Schmidl") were addressed to Achille Tamburlini with an indication that it was "for Antonio Smareglia".

Toscanini, Arturo (Parma 1867 - New York 1957)

Italian conductor, studied cello, piano and composition at the Parma Conservatory. He first became known in Rio de Janeiro when he conducted *Aida* at the age of 19, but made his Italian debut later that year at the performance of Catalani's *Edmea* in Turin. When he was appointed as the artistic director at La Scala (from 1898 until 1903) he struggled to educate Milan's audience and modify their behaviour by making drastic decisions regarding their demands for the encores. He also made efforts to enrich the repertoire, for example during the season of 1902 – 1903, when he was in favour of including Smareglia's *Oceana*. Toscanini and Boito also indirectly influenced La Scala to stage Smareglia's last opera *Abisso* in 1914.

Despite their strained relations, Toscanini and Smareglia collaborated again in 1918, when the conductor invited Smareglia to work on the completion of Boito's *Nerone*. Although they had completed the first act, Toscanini interrupted the project and turned to Vincenzo Tommasini instead. The conductor's attitude in this matter (in an interview he failed to mention Smareglia's participation in the whole project), provoked further conflict between the two

artists. More importantly, it created a general confusion in the standard reference literature about who worked on the completion of Boito's opera.

Troubetzkoy, Paul (1866 – 1910?)

Russian sculptor and engraver who worked in Italy, pupil of Ernest Bazzaro in Milan. He studied Nature in Italy, Russia and France, creating the works of extremely various styles. It is thought that he was inspired by Rodin. He became Smareglia's friend while the composer lived in Milan. Troubetzkoy is famous for having made a life-size statue of Puccini, situated in front of Puccini's house in Torre del Lago, a sculpture of Catalani, and also the only one existing of Smareglia. The bust is kept in the Civico Museo Teatrale "Carlo Schmidl" in Trieste.

Zampieri, Riccardo (Trieste 1859 – 1930)

Italian journalist, one of the most famous patriots in the history of Trieste. He started to be politically active early in his life, thanks to his friendship with Guglielmo Oberdan, and by collaborating with various journals such as *Il Martello* and *La Giovane Trieste*. He was arrested numerous times, and spent several years of his life in prison (in Innsbruck in 1883 and 1889) or in detainment (1915-18).

Zampieri used his position as chief editor (from 1883) and later as a director of Trieste's leading irredentistic newspaper *L'Indipendente* (from 1893-1914) to express his continuous resistance against the Austrian government and to fight for freedom. The journal was known for its daily attack on Austrian authorities, as well as for having most censorship of its material and the largest number of arrests of staff.

As Mario Nordio described it, *L'Indipendente* was a "call for the battle", it was "*una bandiera*" which, under the guidance of Zampieri became the "most arduous and audible expression of irredentism" (Mario Nordio 1962).¹⁵ Among the numerous collaborators around him there were Italo Svevo, Umberto Saba, Arturo Colautti and Silvio Benco. Zampieri was a friend of Benco's father Giovanni Benco, and was first to notice his talent for writing. He was perceptive enough to sense Benco's patriotic feelings, which had been inherited from his father, who was an active supporter of the Liberal Party.

Through Benco, Zampieri became Smareglia's friend. He admired art, having studied it himself in Academia delle Belle Arti in Venice and having specialised in painting in Rome (from 1879 to 1891). Among his other musician friends were Ferruccio Busoni and Luigi Ricci.

¹⁵ Mario Nordio was, like Silvio Benco, one of the young men around Zampieri on the editorial staff of the journal.

Zuccoli, Delia de (1882 – 1949)

Italian writer of a noble family from Modena, wife of Silvio Benco. Her activity as a writer began in 1901, when she took her first efforts to be read by Benco, who was at the time a member of the editorial staff at *L'Indipendente*. Delia started to collaborate with the newspaper, and in 1904 married Benco. Subsequently she worked with other journals and newspapers, an activity which she pursued throughout her life. Her first book, *Creature* (Bologna: Edizioni Appolo, 1926), was written as a collection of short stories, among which one, entitled *Mio marito*, is dedicated to Silvio Benco. In 1937 her novel *Ieri* (Milan: Casa Editrice Ceschina) was published. Delia narrates a story, set in Trieste, which evolves around the lives of a brother and sister, Tito and Tita. In reality, the story is highly autobiographical, depicting her own encounter with Silvio Benco. According to the Triestine literary critic, Pietro Pancrazi, the writings of Delia Benco share something in common with those of Slataper, Carlo and Gianni Stuparich, and Benco himself. Each of these artists were devoted to Trieste, and wrote about their native town in its particularly eventful years in history (prior to the First World War).

Delia was famous for her beauty, and her unusual and refined elegance and sense of style. It appears, from numerous accounts, that she was a very distinctive character and made a definite impression on the people in the city and on other artists (she was known for her close friendship with then famous theatre actress Eleonora Duse). She has been described as a genuine, complex and sparkling individual. Despite the fact that she had an innate curiosity it was thought that she was not particularly intellectual; she deliberately relied on Benco's wider genuine knowledge.

Zuccoli, Gastone de (Trieste 1887 – Trieste 1958)

Italian organist, pianist and composer. He acquired a basic musical education from his mother, and then went to Parma to study piano, organ and composition with Arnaldo Galliera, graduating from the Parma Conservatory in 1907. Soon after he graduated, Zuccoli taught piano at the Trieste Conservatory, and became an eminent organist in the city. He was the author of numerous compositions for piano, organ, piano and solo voice, of the popular patriotic song for choir and orchestra entitled *La riscossa. Inno di Redenzione della gente giuliana* (XXVIII ottobre - III novembre 1918) and of various orchestral compositions (such as the symphonic poem *Autunno*, 1911 and *La notte di Getsemani*, 1921). Among his work there

is also one theatrical work which remained unfinished: the one act opera, entitled *Il lago*, was set to a text written by Benco (in 1924).¹⁶

Zuccoli was close to Smareglia and his circle of friends at the time the composer lived in Trieste. They developed a close friendship, and Smareglia taught the young composer composition and orchestration; the influences can be traced in his work *Autunno* (there are echoes of *Abisso* and *Falena*, according to Radole 1988: 222-223). According to Benco, Smareglia dictated the music of *Abisso* to Zuccoli. The young artist was devoted to and strongly believed in Smareglia, dedicating to the composer a book entitled *Per un Ideale di Giustizia! Ai giovani musicisti d'Italia (For an ideal of justice! To the young musicians of Italy)*, first published in Trieste in 1912). The same volume was issued again by Circolo Musicale Giuliana in 1923 as *Antonio Smareglia, Monografia sulle opere del Maestro, con note musicali illustrative*.

Zonca, Conte Gaudenzio dalla

Italian business man, originally from Dignano in Istria (the original setting for Smareglia's *Nozze istriane*). He helped Smareglia financially, and let him use his villa in Arcade al Piave at the time when Smareglia was working on *Oceana*. One of his sons, Primo della Zonca, became Smareglia's pupil and took down the dictation (of *Oceana*) from Smareglia.

¹⁶ Benco's manuscript of this one act drama is preserved in the Archive of the Biblioteca Civica in Trieste. Along with the text, there are also Zuccoli's own sketches of music for the future opera. It is from this handwriting that we can recognise that Zuccoli was involved in taking dictations from Smareglia and in copying Smareglia's music since the same handwriting appears on the several of preserved handwritten copies of Smareglia's score, kept in the Archives of Casa Musicale Sonzogno in Milan.

APPENDIX B – UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

The following is the transcription of 13 unpublished letters written by Antonio Smareglia to Silvio Benco. The composer dictated them to his scribes; through the signatures which were, at times, placed at the bottom of these letters we learn that these were his son Ariberto Smareglia, his friend and student Primo dalla Zonca, and another copyist whose name was not signed in any of the letters. These letters make a significant contribution to the published part of Smareglia's correspondence. The transcripts correct a small number of misspellings and details of punctuations (capitalisation, paragraphing, adding some omitted quotation marks) and use italics for the title of works; these revisions have been done only when it seemed appropriate to do so and for the benefit of the reader (to avoid the usage of 'sic!'). The passages in [square brackets] are editorial: usually these were illegible words whose meaning was possible to guess. In several cases there were parts of letters missing. If placed at the start of the letter, the text in the brackets includes my own comments on the letter.

These letters are kept in the diplomatic archives of the Biblioteca Civica "A. Hortis" in Trieste. They form part of the manuscripts belonging to the patrimony of Silvio Benco, are catalogued in the box "numero 10" as Benco's "correspondence received" (corrispondenza ricevuta), and bear the signature R. P. Ms. Misc. 58. Some of the letters were transcribed and quoted by Giuliana Novel in her article "Visione musicalissima" e "simbolo pittorico": la Falena di Silvio Benco e Antonio Smareglia'.¹

There are numerous other letters, either written by Smareglia or to him, which are awaiting transcription and publication. Some are kept in Piacenza, while 78 additional letters are mentioned in a letter in the archives of Civico Museo Teatrale "Carlo Schmidl" in Trieste; it is likely that these letters belong to the "gift of Elisa Tamburlini", which the Tamburlini family left to the archives.²

Letter with no number. [missing the beginning; black ink, handwriting different from that of Ariberto or Primo dalla Zonca]

... [A]lle prove: tornerò quindi per Trieste unicamente per trovare te e qualche altro amico e soprattutto per discutere sul nuovo libretto. Ho definitivamente [rinunziato] alla [*Morte dell'*] *usignolo* e distruggerò la musica scritta: vorrei però che il libretto [capitasse] in mani possibilmente [degne] e se credi mi occuperò qui a Milano o te lo rimanderò. Naturalmente vorrei che tu facessi un buon affare. Scrivimi il tuo desiderio in proposito. Ho ritoccato qualche breve episodio del primo e secondo atto [dell'] *Abisso* [...] definitivamente finito ma non penso più: nel prossimo mese si stamperà.

Lunedì sarò a Milano per rimetter a posto il III atto [dell'] *Oceana* per pubblicare la nuova edizione: ho poi sviluppato i preludi *Cornill* ch'erano di [funzione] troppo ristretta perché possano andare con qualche importanza nei concerti.

¹ See Ivano Cavallini and Paolo da Col, eds., "Cosmopolitismo e nazionalismo nella musica a Trieste", pp. 45-65.

² The letter [the author's name is illegible] mentioned was written in October 1960, and talks about the sculptor Achille Tamburlini living in Venice from 1900-1901 in "palazzo Contarini". Smareglia was a guest in the sculptor's house for a while. The author comments that the widow of the sculptor had left him a total of 78 letters, which the composer received while he lived in their house.

In Novembre e Dicembre voglio scrivere una suite per orchestra e intendo spero che tu avrai trovato il nuovo libretto. Scrivi mi a Milano al solito via Pagano 50. [...] che finalmente ti concedi un po' di riposo tanto più ch'ero sempre preoccupato per te...[...].

Ti saluto, tuo Antonio Smareglia.

[Rovigo], 12 V 1912.

Letter B. C. 1251 [same handwriting as in the letter with no number]

Caro Benco,

Ti mando un libretto con le ultime tue correzioni; io ho finito di mettere a posto il I atto e le modificazioni ma non sono molto [certo] [...] se [stesse] importanti ma assai utili per l'insieme e per la chiarezza dell'azione. Ti prego di scrivermi subito se ritieni di cambiare a pag. 15 le parole di Mariela: "Vorrei piacergli", a pag. 22 per il tuo esame, e a pag. 21: "Cattivo! Cattivo!" che mi sembra forse troppo realistico. Se però tu vuoi conservare tutto come sta, se non sei cioè della mia opinione, informami con cartolina o mandami i [...] cambiamenti. Non aver paura delle modificazioni sulla battaglia per correggere quel taglio brusco di 20 battute: le ridurrò alla metà circa o poco più e qui ti accludo uno [...] dal quale puoi farti una idea come erano costruite le 30 battute tagliate. Se tu aggiungi qualche brevissima esclamazione per Gisca, Mariela e di Vito e Hanno, esclamazioni che sopportino qualche pausa tra l'una e l'altra siamo a posto. Si tratterà in tutto di circa 4 versi: si potrebbe anche modificare le parole di Hanno: "E tu – su miei passi che vuoi? E tu - via, donne! Libera il campo!", in modo che Gisca e Mariela rimangano al proscenio al punto che dicono: "Mariela, Gisca ancor sorelle" (pag. 62).

Temo però che in questa forma non si riesce ad evitare l'inoperosità e l'imbarazzo che Gisca e Mariela possano [avere] ancora sul palcoscenico. Tu ricordi certo come riusciva e dove languiva il [...] dunque fa quello che credi fa il meglio o in ogni modo credo che per te si tratta di fare soltanto quattro versi. Credi che la Baldassan potrebbe fare la Gisca? Sarebbe certo un'ottima Marussa, sebbene ha il difetto di pronunciar poco [chiaramente]. Probabilmente alla fine del mese andrò a Milano per parlare con Toscanini e per sentire qualche cantante. Salutami il maestro [Vigna?] se lo [vedi].

Saluti tuo Smareglia.

Letter B. C. 1252 [the handwriting the same as in letter 1251]

Caro Benco,

[...] tornato da Fiume mi disse che al Teatro Nuovo hanno stabilito di fare in autunno le *Nozze* e che al Comunale hanno intenzione di fare [in primavera] *Abisso* ma questo non [potrà] venir definito sino in dicembre perché [con] quell'opera scade il contratto con l'attuale impresa e bisogna attendere che venga rinnovato l'appalto con l'impresa che sarà la stessa di prima. [...].

[...] fra una decina di giorni circa avrò finito tutte le modificazioni che voglio portare a Milano a Toscanini prima della metà di maggio. Ti prego di non [...] a accomodarmi ancor un paio di versi:

"Han congiunto le voci ..."

“Cantano felicità ...”,

bisogna che l’ultimo verso sia un settenario con l’accento sulla seconda sillaba perché deve sostituire “la lor felicità”. Qui mi è proprio impossibile mutare l’accento [p. c. ?][per cortesia?] congiunti insieme cantano la loro felicità (tanto per spiegarmi) ma bisogna che tra l’uno e l’altro verso vi possa essere qualche battuta di aspetto, cioè che il [concetto] di un verso sia indipendente da quello dell’altro.

Nella battaglia ho tagliato parecchie battute quindi ho dovuto stringere il coro interno. Pag 60: almeno nella musica deve essere così

“A la morte [...] abbiamo i petti

A la morte [sacro] abbiamo le spade!

O giunte spade,

Oltre [alla] morte portateci lassù!”

Come vedi il III verso è ridotto a quinario [liscio], puoi quindi modificare più il senso.

Nel III atto non credi sarebbe bene tagliare del tutto il campanaro? Si perde [...] soltanto l’importante [...]: la pazza, la pazza!

[...] si può supporre che Gisca venga in scena attratta dalle campane sulla torre perché compare dopo pochi tocchi affidati all’attuale campanaro in quanto si potrebbe supporre ch’ella si sia rifugiata nel castello. [...]

Tuo Smareglia

Letter B. C. 1253 [the handwriting differs from that of Ariberto or Primo dalla Zonca]

Caro Benco,

sono lieto di sapere che in breve penserai al nuovo libretto e ti ringrazio. Ti avevo proposto un elemento o ambiente slavo prevalente perché si presta a una espressione musicale assai passionale elemento già sviluppato nelle *Nozze Istriane* e che riesce sempre efficacissimo. D’altronde non è indispensabile nemmeno il colore slavo, si tratta di fare una cosa vibrante con personaggi assai staccati nel loro carattere, eventualmente con qualche elemento comico o caratteristico ecc. In una parola un’opera di forte impressione. Per popolare intendevo passioni e movenze psichiche che tutti siano in grado di sentire e condividere, non dunque idealità astratte o visioni poetiche, bisognerà evitare svolgimenti di azioni parallele che non risultano quasi mai, infine di limitare al più possibile le esigenze vocali e orchestrali.

Sono certo che ormai tu sai meglio di me cosa effettivamente vorrei e più certo sono ancora che farai una cosa magnifica. Non importi di fare il libretto in fretta, è un ottimo sistema che le situazioni si sviluppino naturalmente dai loro germi sino a tanto che risultano complete. Se avrò il libretto per la prossima primavera anche in aprile, basterà. Intanto vorrei fare un operetta avendo per combinazione conosciuto un libretto che mi sembra straordinario tale da fare sperare i più brillanti risultati finanziari: non mi sembra necessario far tutta la vita l’uomo serio una parentesi simile a qualche [sbornia] non dovrebbe far male.

Scrivimi che te ne pare. Ariberto per ragioni di [tipo] militare verrà a Trieste ai primi d'ottobre e t'informerà dettagliatamente su tutto, in breve spero mandarti il libretto dell'operetta che avrebbe per titolo ["Mamut"] per avere il tuo autorevole parere del quale terrò conto assoluto per [...non readable half of the page]

[...?] la scala posso dirti che il pseudo mecenate Duca non è altro che uno speculatore socio di Renzo Sonzogno, la cosa è ormai pubblica e non manca di fare un po' di scandalo o almeno commenti certo poco lusinghieri per quella maschera di mecenate. Ciò ti spiega che anche quest'anno ci sono alla Scala quasi quattro novità di Renzo o a lui date in rappresentanza: Donne furiose, Salome, Feuersnot, Habanera. La [camorra] milanese è così [?] e peggiorata ma si spera che in breve la brutta cosa provocherà reazione e forse scandalo. Procura startene via da Trieste il più possibile per rinforzarti i polmoni e le gambe.

Che come mi scrivi hanno dato risultati superiori a qualsiasi aspettativa [...?] tanto che mi rallegro di cuore. In breve ti scriverò ancora circa Vienna, Napoli ecc. E se non avrò nulla Ariberto ti porterà qualche notizia, ti saluto.

Come sta tuo fratello [Rico?] Tuo Smareglia Antonio

Letter B. C. 1254

[red ink, handwriting the same as in 1253; an incomplete letter since it bears no signature]

Caro Benco!

Ci siamo perfettamente intesi sui cambiamenti e credo che tu gli hai fatto con convinzione perché vanno benissimo, si tratterà forse ancora di piccolissime cose nel primo atto, cioè:

1. Cambiami il vocabolo mortori nell'entrata di Uberto. Il vocabolo cantato riesce disgustoso e puoi sostituirlo con sventura, affanni, crucci, od altro consimile. L'attuale verso suona: "Par che attenda mortori e attenda amor".
2. Converrà ancora con lo stesso sistema ampliare le frasi di Uberto e Stellio nella scena del ladro, cioè: "Innanzi alla giustizia sacra degli avi nostri (che così che colà) quest'uomo accusò": Stellio: (invece che "uccise e tradì") un verso ... un frase. Uberto: "Rubò le prede de la caccia di corsa d'Averardo!" Sostituisci con due versi più lunghi senza la corsa d' Averardo. Stellio: "Al tuo sovrano (che così che colà) discolpati o confessati" (cioè più lungo) e ciò è tutto che ti prego di mandarmi al più presto trattandosi di 4 parole. Ho riscritto a [Franchi] pregandolo di spedirmi un libretto dell'edizione di Roma, non ho avuto risposta, ti prego di scrivere anche tu una cartolina pregando di spedire un libretto anche te, e che gli rimetteremo il relativo [franco]. Mi spiace assai la non venuta di Rocco e gli dirai che lo dichiaro porco sperando che rimedierà in breve perché altrimenti lo chiamerò cinghiale. Ieri ho comperato *L'Illustrazione* col tuo [pupolo]. A casa mia lo guardavano e lo commentavano in tutti i sensi. Io sono stato lietissimo ed orgoglioso di vederti finalmente illustrato e argomentato anche per un senso egoistico di non essere cioè io solo disonorato.

Attendo *La Fiamma Fredda* per la quale ho grande curiosità. D'Annunzio ti ha mai scritto? Sai niente del progetto d'Albano? Nemmeno circa l'idea del poeta sulla tragedia musicale progettata e che dovevamo fare assieme? Dì a Manzutto che mi è piaciuto molto il suo sproloquio sulla *Germania* meno qualche proliscità e citazione di carattere tecnico inutile mi è sembrata esatta e scritta con competente convinzione stando sempre al criterio che mi sono formato da ciò che ho sentito dire. Ferrari ieri mi assicurava che a Napoli e Roma, la *Germania* ebbe un insuccesso finanziario e produsse la più profonda noia. Ferrari disse essere stato a Roma e Napoli e assicura esatte le sue informazioni aggiungendo che I [sic] articoli dei giornali in proposito [svisanti] la realtà sono mistificazione a base di biglietti di Banca. Mandami l'articolo che hai scritto su Toscanini dalla Scala, non ho nessuna notizia circa una combinazione di una mia opera per l'anno venturo come mi avevano detto. Tutto sommato [i] fatti di questi signori sono molto differenti dalle loro parole, esclamazioni, e proteste. Schuch mi scrive che mi aspettava alla fine di Aprile o al più tardi del 1 di maggio, partendo egli alla metà di questo mese. Informa quindi Kurelik di anticipare la partenza. Vedrai, caro Benco, che ora faremo una *Falena* come tu forse la vedevi nella fantasia. Anche per conti...

... [missing pages].

Letter B. C. 1255 [handwriting appears to be that of Primo dalla Zonca]

Da Venezia, 27 [?]

Caro Benco,

mi dispiace che sia andata smarrita la mia lunga lettera contenente anche due lettere di [Gastone] con le quali m'informava che anche alla sesta uscita di *Oceana* il Teatro era tutto venduto, che il successo fu superiore per applausi e chiamate a tutte le altre recite ma che *Oceana* non si può fare più poiché Zanatello deve fare *Il Ballo in maschera* e probabilmente *I Lituani*, ecc. ecc.

Ti scrivevo poi, che voglio ora pubblicare la *Falena* e che è indispensabile introdurre qualche modificazione o meglio qualche aggiunta.

Alcuni episodi mancano del necessario sviluppo per ottenere l'impressione e specialmente, manca qualche assai utile [sviata?] lirica, [vulgo?] cantata. Ricevo un libretto di *Falena*, ma mi occorre l'edizione di Roma che ti prego di pescare fuori da Manzutto o dal De Sancti, credo uno devi averne anche tu.

Ecco le aggiunte indispensabili al 1° atto:

1. Dopo il verso d'Uberto: "... che han rallegrato la figlioula mia!" aggiungere altri due continuando il concetto per attaccare: "Povero vecchio, predicando vò"
2. Dopo il verso: "Pazienza è un' altra età!..." aggiungere un paio di brevi spezzati fra il coro e Albina e poi almeno altri 10 versi per Uberto di carattere melodico nella struttura, nel metro e nel concetto, per attaccare poi: Re Stellio torna da la sua caccia"...

Questa sortita del baritono che è già sacrificato nella sua parte, per la troppa brevità era appena degna di un comprimario: un logo con ampliamento quindi sarà utilissimo.

3. Converrà aggiungere un paio di versi ancora sempre per Uberto prima o dopo il verso: "...Frenate i palpiti! Ci vuol pazienza..."
4. Cambierai il concetto nel verso di Albina: ... "Conturbate, da uno sbattere d'ali , strano ... strano..." per eliminare tutto ciò che ha della farfalla o del volare ciò che trasse in errore e in malevoli commenti sul personaggio di Falena. Occorrerà però conservare la quantità di sillabe, cioè la lunghezza del verso.
5. Aggiungere altri due versi per Stellio dopo il verso: "... cacciato per i poveri a lor dono le prede!..." Starà bene per l'entrata di Stellio un ampliamento di frase. Non mi piace l'esclamazione di Stellio: "Uberto! Uberto!" dopo il verso: "ch'è una dolce parola: perdonare." È oscura quanto [mai] e non dice niente. Veniamo all'ultimo brano: cambierai l'esclamazioni di Stellio: "Vattene o la mia gente chiamo ... la mia gente chiamo", perché mi sembra ingenua e puerile dato il momento, sostituirla con una frase efficace.
6. Al nuovo brano che ti accludo, al verso: "dolcemente dormi re Stellio!..." bisogna fare per la Falena un più largo sviluppo circa dieci versi di voluttà, di seduzione, di incantamento e il momento si presta ed il concetto è già accennato dal verso suddetto: "dolcemente dormi Re Stellio". Così la Falena avrà una frase calda di carattere voluttuoso insinuante che contrasterà moltissimo col carattere della sua entrata, e metterà subito in vista anche la parte sensuale del suo essere perché l'appunto il nuovo brano dovrebbe essere pieno di promesse insinuanti, voluttuose, sensuali. In questo brano potranno venir gettate esclamazioni o qualche frasetta di Albina per non lasciarla sulla scena imbarazzata col far niente. Dopo questo brano altri tre o quattro versi energici, satanici per finire col versi: "stanotte, quando l'anima ti chiamerò..." e la Falena sparirà dopo aver introdotto veramente una forte e svariata impressione sull'[auditorio].

Dopo questa sparizione si deve sentire la voce di Uberto chiamante Albina, e Uberto entrerà in scena dopo sparita la Falena; egli non deve averla vista, e qui si svolgerà una breve scena dove Albina narrerà l'accaduto fra singhiozzi (e qui accenneremo il brano musicale del pianto, del secondo atto). Anche Uberto avrà qualche frase di dolore cantata, tutto sarà breve cioè proporzionato per attaccare poi il verso: "Deh, tutti venite! Venite da le case ...", ecc.

Lavorerò ad Uberto dopo: quattro garzoni intanto le esigenze qualitative: "Forti nel braccio e d'animo gentile". Queste sono frette e false dato il momento psichico del personaggio e rotonderai la frase aggiungendo alcune parole calde che sviluppano una buona frase melodica.

Il finale poi resta come era, per conto tuo, io però ho immaginato un ritocco musicale che fonderà tutto in una sola cosa. L'atto 2° per quanto riguarda a te può rimanere come nell'edizione di Roma. Io farò qualche lieve miglioramento nella musica.

Atto 3° La scena tra Stellio e la Falena prima che chiamino: "O morio! O Morio!" deve venire ampliata, svolgendo maggior ricchezza, varietà e forza di passione, di scatti con qualche frase violenta specialmente per la Falena, qualche tirata melodica o drammatica, perché come sta la scena è povera, meschina e la Falena in questo atto non riesce sulla scena ad ottenere impressione alcuna. Nell'opera i personaggi per impressionare devono cantare, manifestare i sentimenti svariati del loro carattere e Wagner ne fa un

esempio luminoso nei suoi libretti che fa fare ai suoi personaggi delle tirate di lunghezza anche esagerata per ottenere equilibrio con la parte sinfonica che fa lo sfondo dei suoi lavori.

Nella didascalia dopo le parole di Falena: “Stellio, aiuto!... Stellio, addio!...” elimina lo svolazzare che pure ha dato luogo a malevoli e sbagliate interpretazioni sul personaggio. Via pure il vola ...

Cambiare quindi l'idea:... è una grande farfalla che vola per le ... che è facilmente sostituibile con altro verso che non stabilisca la farfalla. Nel finale occorrerebbe aggiungere una frase, strofa celestiale per Albina che non dice ora che due parole.

Forse anche a Stellio verso la fine gli si potrebbe far fare qualche altro slancio melodico, aggiungendo qua o là qualche verso.

Caro Benco, è assai bene che la Falena non si sia ancora pubblicata perché aveva delle imperfezioni e delle deficienze specialmente nello sviluppo. I personaggi per interessare sulla scena esigono assolutamente una data estensione della loro parte e ciò per quanto riguarda i singoli dettagli e l'insieme.

Ogni parte presa per sè stessa va esaminata ed elaborata in modo che dia un'esplicazione interessante. Tutto sommato per conto tuo si tratta di pochi versi, io ritoccherò anche dei brani che nel libretto restano conservati; nelle aggiunte ti raccomando d'informarti specialmente alla forma lirica musicalmente parlando melodica, poiché di declamato ce n'è abbastanza forse troppo, e con questo elemento unico non s'impressiona sufficientemente, trattandosi di cantanti che devono cantare. Non dico questo per criteri speculativi, commerciali, ma per una necessità estetica che forma la base dell'esistenza del melodramma.

Ora *La Falena* andrà subito alle stampe e bisogna ridurla in modo che per perfezione di proporzioni e equilibrio e per ricchezza non stia troppo distante dall'*Oceana* che rimarrà sempre superiore. *La Falena* però avrà il vantaggio di essere composta di elementi tragici e fortemente drammatici che ottengono sempre le più forti impressioni nei pubblici. Ti prego di trovare un libretto nell'edizione di Roma e mandarmi al più presto che ti è possibile i cambiamenti unitamente al libretto.

Almeno quelli del 1° atto mio occorrono prestissimo, per incominciare il lavoro e dar l'opera alle stampe; spero quindi che al più tardi me li manderai per Rocco che credo sarà a Venezia mercoledì 8. I motivi che ora voglio occuparmi di Falena te li esporrò a voce e chissà non riesca combinarla alla Scala con la Termina e Borgatti che devono fare *il Crepuscolo*. Conserva questa mia perché possa ricordarmi quanto ti ho scritto e risentire sui singoli punti alla tua venuta a Venezia.

Addio saluti da Primo

Tuo Ant Smareglia.

1. Cambia nel brano nuovo le parole di Albina. “È sì vicino ... eppure tanto lontano”.... Questo giochetto di parole guasta il momento appassionato drammatico.

[some pages of the letter missing?]

Brano nuovo aggiunto:

Stellio: Vattene, o chiamo gente!
Ignota: Vuoi la nemica o l'amante, dì?
Stellio, minaccia: La mia gente chiamo!
L'Ignota, con uno stridulo riso: Tu questa notte l'anima tua
 chiamerò dal sonno,
 dal sonno che su te
 con l'ali nere stendo!

(si frappone tra Stellio ed Albina ed allarga su lui il manto. Stellio indietreggia, pur non potendo togliere gli occhi da quello di lei)

Albina (con un grido): Stellio! Da me lontano!
 Stellio!
L'ignota: La notte è mia!
 E quando impongo un sonno inesorabile sul ciglio de gli umani, [ei]
 non si destano
 Se non per correr folli tra le tenebre a cercar le mie braccia: Stellio è
 mio!

(Stellio cade sui ginocchi e [prostende] le mani supplici, L'Ignota, sempre guardandolo, si allontana fino al limitare [del bosco] d'onde è uscita. Qui si ferma. Stellio, levatosi, con [frasi] barcollanti, si dirige dietro i suoi occhi, dietro il cenno bianco della sua mano. Albina lo segue supplicando)

Albina: Stellio! Stellio! Non ode?...
 Non m'ode più..
 Son come straniera...
 È sì vicino ... e pure
 Tanto lontano

(Stellio ricade sui ginocchi e sembra non poter vincere il torpore)

L'Ignota (chinando su lui): Dolcemente dormi,
 re Stellio! ... Io chiamerò Tu sorgerai ...
 a me verrai...
 ecc ecc.

Stellio: Lo sguardo
 Mi tiene ... mi strugge ... m'annienta
 Spietato ... divorro
 Ne l'occhio la lagrima...
 Sul l'abbro il lamento.

(ma sotto il guardo dell'ignota, ei non può più parlare; gli s'inventrano, gli si spengono gli occhi a poco a poco; egli china la testa sul l'erba e il sopore lo vince)

Ignota: Stanotte, quando l'anima ti chiamerò dal sonno,
 O re,
 Signor de gli uomini
 verrai da la sovrana più potente di te!

(Ella passa accanto al corpo disteso, come per assicurarsi di lui; giunta al limite del bosco, vi si caccia, com'è venuta, con un balzo selvaggio: le sue vesti s'aprono che paiono ali. Per un istante un muto terrore regna su la scena (qui entrerà Uberto)

voce di Uberto (più vicino): Albina! Dove sei, Albina?

Albina (gridando accorrendo a quella volta: Aiuta, aiuta padre mio!

Segue la scenetta, di cui ti ho parlato fra Albina e Uberto e poi: Deh, tutti venite!, ecc., ecc.

[the letter includes no clear ending]

Letter B. C. 1256 [signature by Ariberto Smareglia. On the top of the letter added commentary: "indirizzo di Ferrari è: Rodolfo Ferrari Sasso Praduro. Bologna"]

Caro Benco!

Il mio amico [Tavernier] da Torino mi scrive che [sui] concerti orchestrali che avranno luogo durante l'Esposizione si vuole eseguire la "Suite" e l'Overture dell'*Oceana*. Spero che una o l'altra eseguirà Hans Richter in uno dei concerti da lui diretti. Per consiglio del Tavernier ho proposto al Comitato di rappresentare o *La Falena* o le nuove *Nozze Istriane* secondo che alla compagnia si addatterà meglio o l'una o l'altra opera. Direttore delle opere e dei concerti sarà il Ferrari al quale ho scritto oggi pregandolo di appoggiare il progetto. Mi faresti il piacere di scrivergli anche tu due righe in proposito. Il Tavernier poi mi scrive[:] ciò che tu devi immancabilmente fare è di mandare al più presto possibile dati e schiarimenti dell'opera tua in genere, e dell'*Oceana* in ispecie all'avv. L. et Villanis (via Manzoni No. 2, Torino) il quale aspetta ansiosamente per comunicare a parlare di te e dell'arte tua e prepararti così il terreno. Ho scritto oggi al Villanis dicendogli che ho pregato te di disimpegnare tale ufficio. Tu sai ch'io non saprei cosa dire né su me né sui miei lavori o in ogni modo mi troverei assai imbarazzato. Spero vorrai sobbarcarti questo sacrificio e ti prego di scrivermi subito [se] lo farai ma come vedi occorrerebbe subito. Io intanto gli spedisco spartito dell'*Oceana* e del libretto nonché la riduzione per piano della "Suite". Puoi parlarli di *Cornill*, *Nozze*, *Falena* di *Oceana*. I tuoi appunti su quest'opera che andavano bene assai li diedi al Pozza del *Corriere* ma spero che potrai ricostruirli. Ti accludo il campione anzi un pezzettino d'una raccolta di [...] che divorerà e spero il venerdì santo un paio anche con te e Rocco. Fa analizzare questo pezzettino da qualche eccellente [chimico] e vedrai che si compone di sostanze squisite. Ti saluto, scrivimi al più presto,

tuo Antonio Smareglia[signed in Smareglia's name by Ariberto]

[added text by Ariberto]: "Hai pigliato qualche fucilata dai soldati austriaci? Ariberto.

Letter B. C. 1257 [handwriting by Ariberto Smareglia]

Carissimo Benco!

Sono a Venezia da Domenica [corr.]. Non ti ho scritto prima perché di giorno in giorno speravo poterti dire qualcosa di buono, di positivo, in via assoluta non posso ancora scriverti niente ma c'è la più grande probabilità che per l'apertura dell' [Esposizione?] si apra la Fenice con *Oceana* con la messa in scena della Scala e artisti buonissimi tutti approvati da me. Spero che fra pochi giorni quanto ti scrivo diventerà notizia ufficiale. Per ora però non far parola con nessuno meno che con amici intimi. Ti accludo le informazioni di Costantini e [Gastone] della V recita. Da persone che assisterono alla recita seppi che vi fu la più grande attenzione applausi calorosi e molte esclamazioni di: "bravi e bene" durante gli atti e che si chiese il bis del quintetto che Toscanini fa bene di non [accordare]. Il più significativo però si è che al camerino stava affisso il cartello: "Tutto esaurito". Lunedì dopo la tua partenza seppi da Toscanini e Casazza che il direttore Madero dell'opera di Budapest (che assisteva alla seconda recita) disse loro che l'*Oceana* è un vero assoluto capolavoro. Come sai il Madero è un discinto musicista che pure scrisse opere e sinfonie. Per conto mio sono convinto che l'*Oceana* trionferà e che gli idioti e cammorrismi della Scala non bastano a demolirla. Anzi per essere completamente sincero con te ti dico che il nostro lavoro mi [lumi?] della ribalta ha sorpassato le mie aspettative per l'intensità d'impressione e per la perfezione dei dettagli e di tutto l'insieme. Dirai a Rocco che l'aspetto, come d'accordo, ai ultimi [nei quali] giorni tengo certo si rappresenterà alla Scala. Cosa ti pare del modo che quel cretino dell'*Illustrazione italiana* ha trattato il libretto?

Su quell'articolo avrei [...] appunto perché [da fonte te] amico come quei famosi due Pozza...

Mandami quei 4 versi del duetto dell'*Usignolo*. Intanto ti abbraccio e ti saluto sperando di vederti presto a Venezia per la messa in scena d'*Oceana*.

Tuo Antonio Smareglia. Smareglia. [signature by the composer]

Letter B. C. 1258 [handwriting by Ariberto Smareglia. Signed by the composer himself]

Caro Benco!

Ricevo i cambiamenti del terzo atto che vanno magnificamente bene e sono perfetti; anche di quelli del secondo dico lo stesso, soltanto non riesco a trovare la modificazione dei versi a pag. 39:

Stellio: Vino, Renata
 Vino e sogni a Re Stellio!

Renata (didascalia): Bevi!...

Poiché al vino e al bere per la 2^a volta abbiamo deciso di rinunciare, altro non c'è da fare. In quanto alle didascalie mi [occorrerebbero] esatte per mettere nello spartito prima che nelle bozze di stampa ma in ogni modo c'è tempo perché dalla tua partenza non ho ne scritto né pensato una notamancando quindi tutte le modificazioni del II e III atto alle quali auguro di potermi accingere al più presto.

Qui mi venne parlato del progetto di dare le *Nozze Istriane* questo Carnevale al Rossini rimanendo chiusa la Fenice e pensano anzi di [scrivere] il tenore Paoli Antonio. Vedremo e t'informerò!

Della *Tosca* non sapevo niente di esatto perché i giornali italiani continuano a mistificare tutti e tutto a vantaggio degli editori e delle [boiate] dilettantesche. Intanto questi fanno soldi e noi moriamo

d'accidente o [d'inedia]! Notizie buone le aspetto sempre quindi non posso dartene e perciò non ho altro che dirti in compenso ti accludo un'interessante circolare che arriva in molti esemplari sino a Venezia, falla leggere anche a Pierobon che gli piacerà. Credo che le modifiche alle didascalie si riduranno a poche parole.

Son contento che al *Piccolo* non ti trovi tanto male ma io spero per te sempre e in breve una posizione di gran lunga migliore.

Ti saluto affettuosamente ricordami a tua mamma e i tuoi. Di salute stiamo bene.

Ringraziandoti, tuo aff. Antonio Smareglia. Smareglia [signature by the composer]

PS. Non riesco a trovare la circolare. Gallone mi fa sapere che eseguirà in un grande concerto a Roma la Suite dell'*Oceana*, esecuzione che mi rende qualche spesa e niente altro.

PS. Caro Benco! Ho letto nel "Trieste": [...] delle [...] d'un Ricciolti Garibaldi, si metteranno presto le pive nel "sacco". Saluti, Ariberto.

Letter B. C. 1259 [on paper headed as 'Milan, Hotel National, Place de la Scala. Handwriting by Primo dalla Zonca]

Carissimo Benco,

splenditamente procedono le prove di *Oceana*, fra l'ammirazione di Toscanini e di tutti i professori d'orchestra. È neccessario che tu debba essere a Milano al più tardi Giovedì. Ieri [fummono] da Boito che confermò la sua bella opinione sul libretto e si mostrò entusiasta e sorpreso della musica. Speriamo che così abbia pure a pensarla il pubblico del 20.

Io sto benissimo malgrado il terribile tempo di qui e sperando che non ti farai aspettare ti saluto affettuosamente assieme a Primo.

Tuo Ant. Smareglia

Salutami Rocco e figli che l'avverterò in tempo circa il giorno preciso della prima esecuzione.

Letter B. C. 1267 [it is a fragment of the letter, missing the first two pages and the end; written in black ink, seems to have been wet and stained; corresponds in part to the letter numbered as B. C. 1264]³

(...melodica, quindi converrà [usare] della strofa serrata per modo di dire manzoniana), vorrei un elemento slavo assai predominante e poche esigenze o almeno non eccessive di cantanti e orchestra. Dopo *Falena*, *Oceana*, *Abisso* sono un po' stanco ed esaurito del predominio sinfonico, vorrei ora riposarmi sull'elemento vocale. Le condizioni che ti [...] per ora le stesse d'*Abisso*. Io vedo che il Carso con il suo sfondo slavo potrebbe suggerirti il [fillato]. Qui vengo assediato da librettisti fra i quali [Moschino, Colantuoni, Zangarini...]⁴ ... e ai quali rispondo che tu sei l'unico che [sai] fare oggi un libretto e che quindi non ho nessun motivo di cambiare [testo] più che ormai [sentiamo le cose a l'unisono]...."⁵ [...]

[not readable].

Letter B. C. 1268

- Only a piece of paper with verses written for changes in *Falena*; it is not clear if it was a part of a letter; no clear beginning, nor any other text. Written on the other side of a Theatre note-paper "Teatro Goldoni", announcing a performance 6 April 1903: Gioventù, idillio in 3 atti di Max Halbe, eseguito 300 volte a Vienna e 300 a Berlino.

Letter B. C. 1269

- written at the back of music sheet – seems from Smareglia's work, not clear which one; contains verses for *Abisso*:

Mariela: Menti! Per lei mi offersi! Per lei che ne soffriva, che ne moriva.

Anselmo: Erri lasciavi! Solo, povero vecchio, al mio abbandono!

Hanno: Ed io ti prendo come casa mia etc...

Hanno: Quando più [bella preda] a chi ha vent'anni e non si [sergila?] mai?

Vito: O signor se lasciammano etc.....".

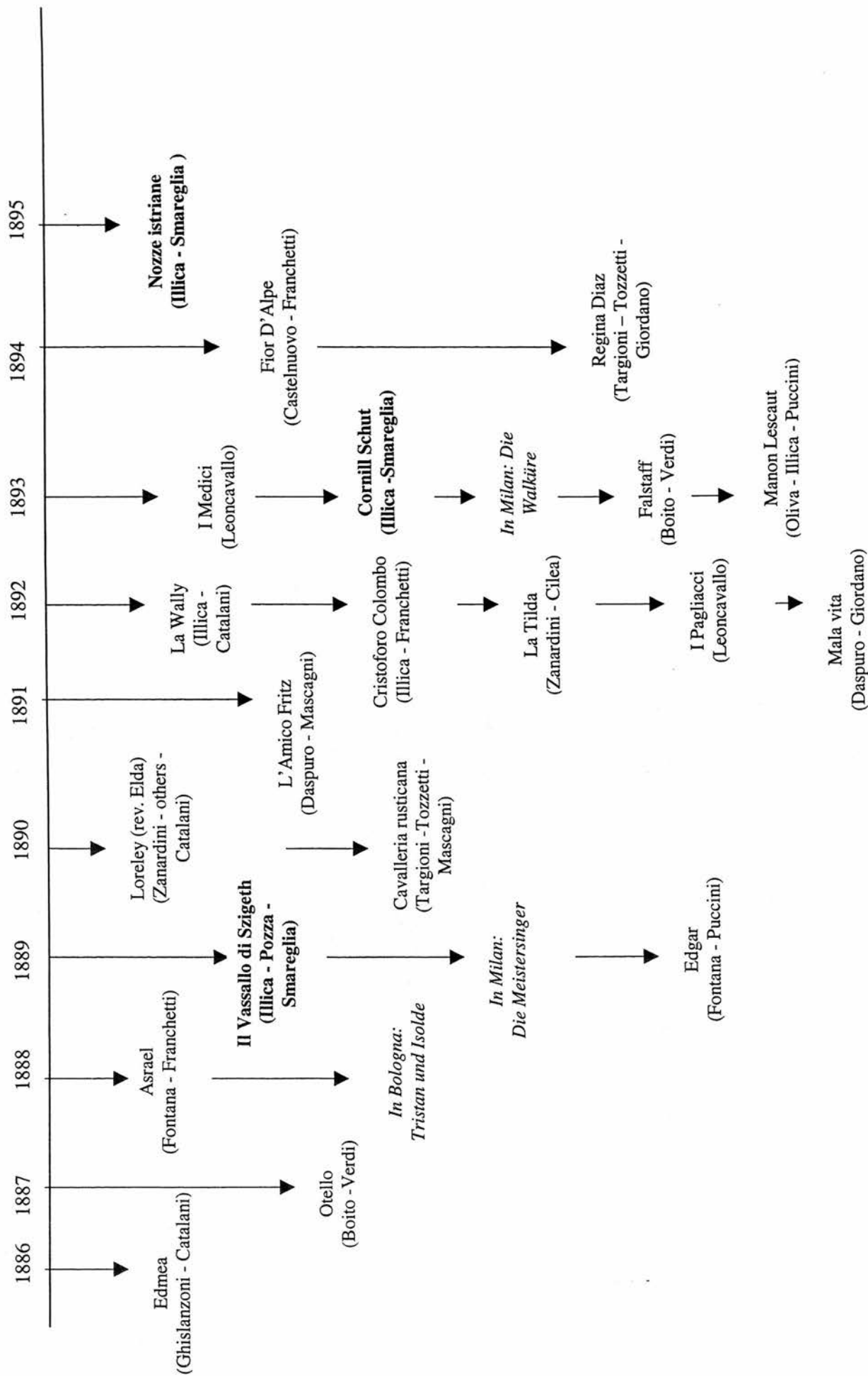
³ This letter strangely corresponds to the letter numbered as B. C. 1264, rendered in a more complete version in the article by Novel, ' "Visione musicalissima" ', p. 58-9. The paragraph which precedes the above letter is the most significant, and complements Smareglia's feelings about a new opera: "... Intanto converrà che ti immagini un altro libretto, ma su questo punto sarà utile che ti comunichi alcune mie intenzioni: vorrei un opera di carattere popolare, con lirica abbondante (musicalmente assai ...).

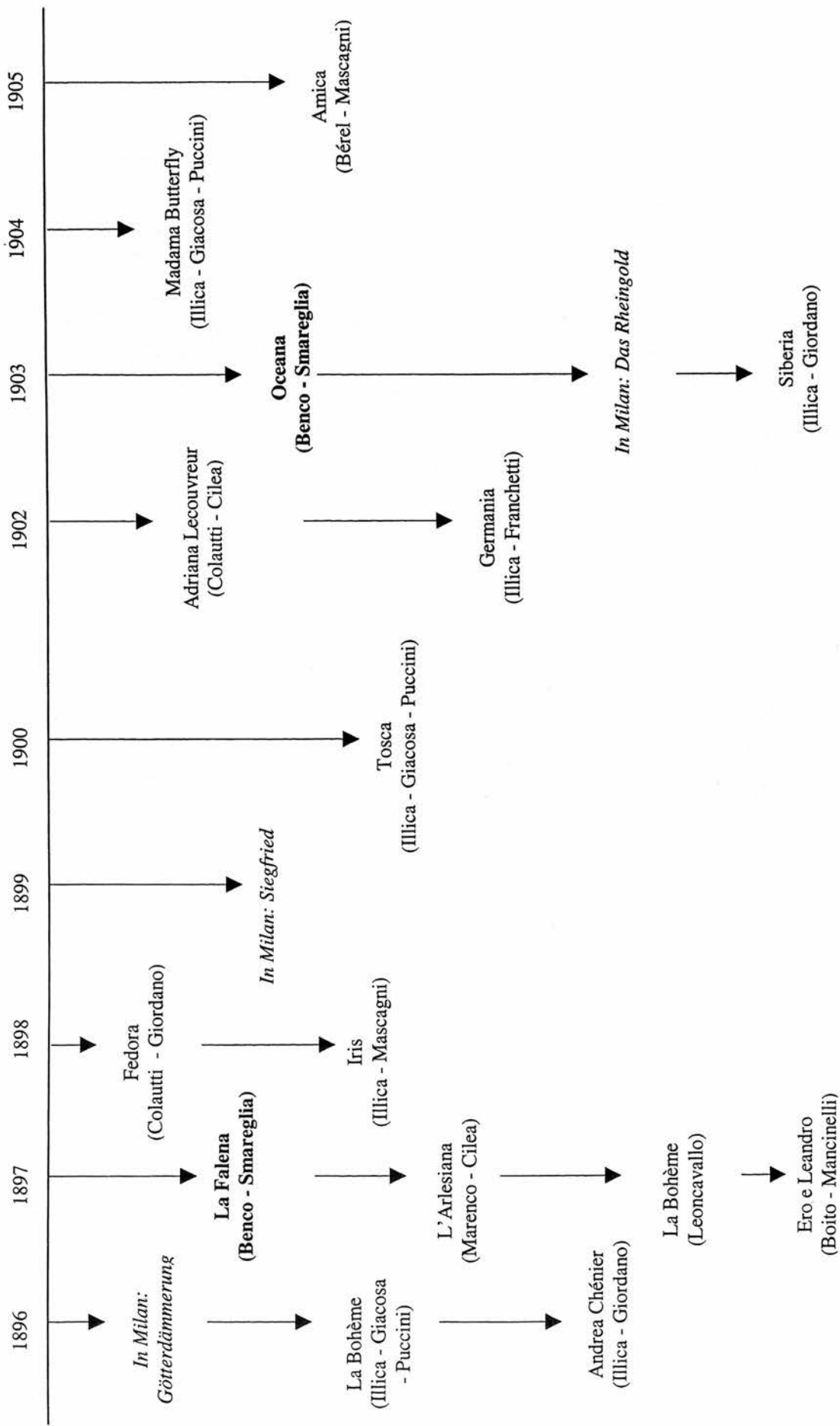
⁴ The names as in the article in *ibid*.

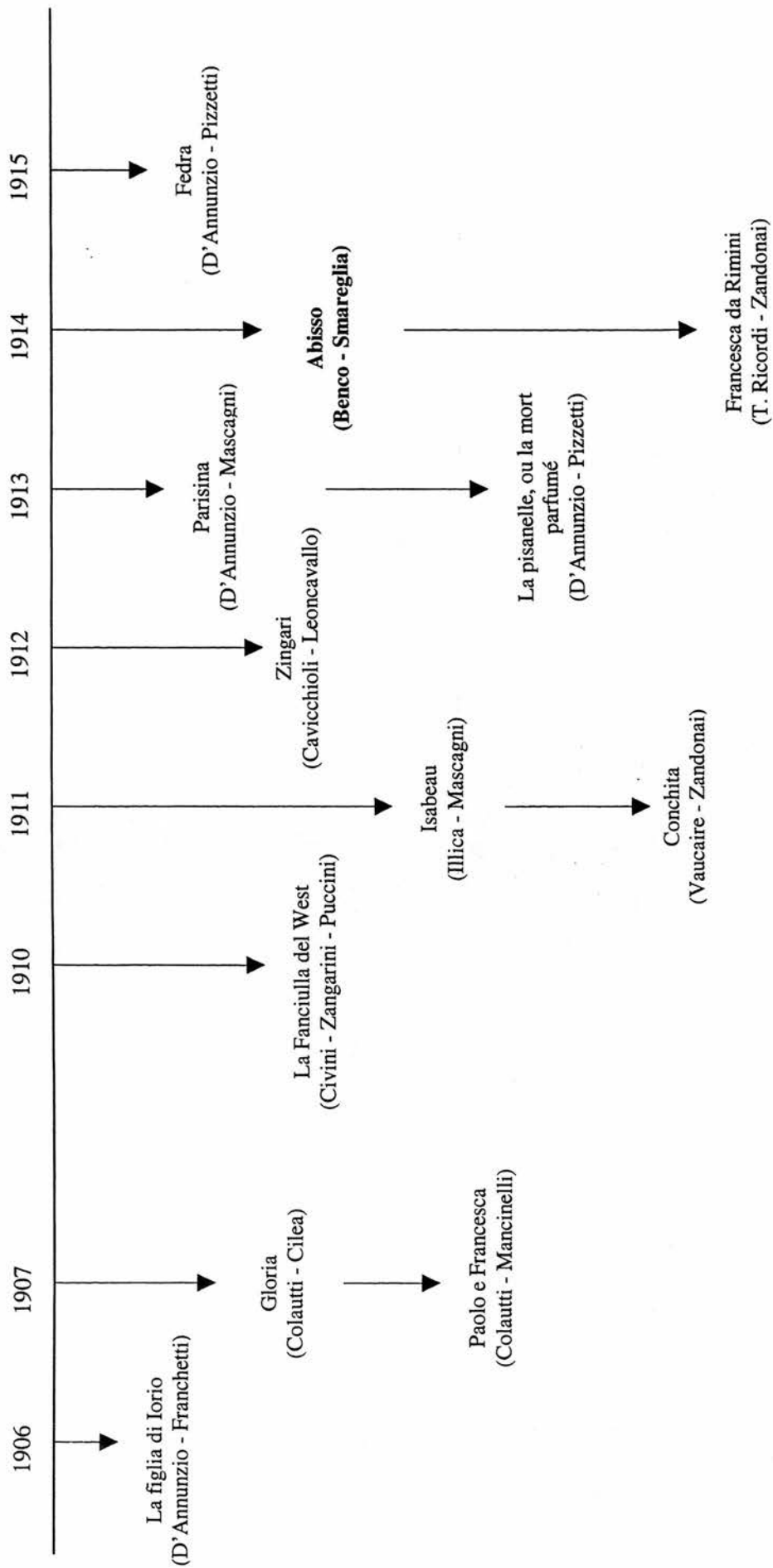
⁵ *Ibid*.

APPENDIX C – TIME LINE 2, 3, 4

The purpose of these time lines is to provide a picture of the new operas which were written in Italy at the turn of the century. The intention was to show where Smareglia's operas stand - in relation to the other works written at the time. The repertory is not complete: the aim was to point out the new operas written mainly by the composers of the "young Italian school". Since the performances of Wagner's operas exerted such influence on these composers, the repertory includes some of the premieres of his operas in Milan's La Scala and in Bologna. Furthermore, since the thesis makes references to the involvement of D'Annunzio in the musical theatre, those of his works set to music by Pizzetti and Debussy are also included.







APPENDIX D – La Falena – music examples

D. 1. The image of Falena, act I, v. s. p. 59 – 64

59

(Stellio ricade sul ginocchio.)
(Stellio fällt wieder auf die Knie.)

A. lei cholo inca - te - na.
ihr; die ihn ge - bannt hüllt!

p *mf* *dim.*

L'Ignota. Die Unbekannte. Adagio. (♩. 72)

A la mia vo - ce il son - no con a - li ca - rez -
Von mir ge - ru - sen sinkt ko - send, wie Fal - ter - flü - gel

p

Albina.

En el sup - pli - zio il cor si strugge.
Mir reicht das Ster - bei ih - ren Wor - ten.

INZ. ze - ro - li si spie - ca dai lon - ta - ni pa - di - gion de lo stel - le o dol - co
wehen lind - aus - dunkel, tie - fer Wald - nacht sü - ßer Schlaf auf die Li - der und frügt dich

A. El - la lo prostra con l'occhio spie - ta - to!
Ach, ihn bezwingt schon der Blick ih - rer Augen!

LI. I. dol - co su tuoi ci - gli ca - - la. A un a - la che ti sfio - ra i ca -
lo - so zu dem Heer der Ster - - ne! Dem Hauch, — der dich lockt um -

un poco cresc.

J. E. 1325

60

A. *Chelai fat - to? E - gli mìa - ma - va; ede - ra tut - to*
Was lust du? Er warnein Ei - gen, lie - bend mir ver -

L1 *pel - li, a - la di so - gno, tu do-man - di il se - gre - to di fa -*
flü - tel, tau - schest du se - lig: denn er flü - stert dir ko - send hol - de

fresc. f. dim.

A. *mi - o. bun - den.*

L1 *vel - le che pa - ion ba - ci e non le u - di - sti ma - i:*
Mär - chen von Won - ne - küs - sen, wie rie - mend sie ge - nos - sen.

Stellio, *Lo sguar - do mi lie - ne... mi strug - ge... m'an - nien - la, è fo - co, di -*
Ihr Blick strahlt Ver - rich - tung zer - bricht mir den Wil - len. Ein Feu - er ver -

A. *dol - ce par - la - va d'a - mor con la dol -*
Sü - ße - ste Wor - te der Lie - be ent - zück - ten

L1 *ti son vi - ci - na e già m'a - scol - ti in*
Ich bin dir na - he, du hörst mich auch im

S. *vo - ra ne l'oc - chio la la - gri - ma, sul lab - bro il la -*
zehrt mich, im Aug brennt die Trä - nen - flut, es be - ben die

cresc. mf. dim.

J. R. 1828.

A. *cez - - za del - - la se - - ra!*
schnei - chetnetnyi - - ne See - - le!

L.I. *so gno. Non du - bi - tar di me, gio - vi - ne a*
Träu - me. O zweif - le nicht an mir Ziel mei - ner

S. *men - to.*
Lip - pen.

L.I. *— mo - re! Ti chia-me-rò sta - nol - te e tu ver - - rai a la fiam - ma ch'è in*
Schn - - sucht, dich ruft heut Nacht die Lie - be du kommst ge - - wiß, auf das sen - gend in ein

L.I. *me con la tua fiam - ma.*
Kuß se - lig dich mit - che.

D.U. *Stellio.*

O - - dou-na vo - ce è sì lon - -
Fern her ver - nehme ich den Ruf der

J. E. 1325.

62

S. ta - na... e chia - ma e quel - lo guar - do anco - ra... Pe - sa, tra - fig - ge - im
 Slim - me; sie zwingt mich und je - ner Blick voll Zau - ber bannst mich; ich muß ge -

p *crase.* *f* *p*

Albina.

L'ignota. Die Unbekannte.

Oh rie - ra nol - - - le!
 O Nacht des Schrek - - - kens!

È mi - o! È mi - o!
 Nur mir ge - hörst du

È in mi - o po - ter!
 bist für e - wig mein

E per la sor - le oc -
 und je - nen teil - den

pe - - - ra.
 hor - - - chen.

din.

cul - ta di quei che ti sa - cri - fi - co ol - te - ne - bra - to e vin - to, o nol - te, e
 Mäch - ten, die herr - schen in der Dun - kel - heit, bist du nun mehr er - ful - len, ein Op - fer der

p

A.
Oh, ne - ra nol - le em - pie - tià ro vi - - na!
O Nacht - ge - spen - ster voll er - rüch - ter Tük - - ke!

L.I.
D.U.
sul - - - - ta. Al - lor che dal - le le - - ne - bre
Höl - - - - le! Wahl - an, wenn dich mein Zu - ber - wort

cresc.

L.I.
D.U.
ti chiamo - rò e dal son - - no, o re, si - gnor de
wæk - ket aus tie - fen Schla - - fe, dann kommst du zu dei - ner

Violino.

p *mf*

Albina.

O ne - ra nol - le, em - pie - tià e ro - vi - - na!
O Nacht - ge - spen - ster voll er - rüch - ter Tük - - ke!

L.I.
D.U.
gliuo mi - ni ver - rai a la re - gi - na più po - ten - - - - te di
Kö - ni - gin und al - le in - tro - z - i - ger Wit - le liegt im Stau - - - - be vor

p *cresc.* *mf cresc.*

J. R. 1325.

(Ella passa accanto al corpo disteso di lui; giunta al limite del bosco vi si caccia, com'è venuta con un balzo selvaggio.)
(Sie geht an dem wie leblos Liegenden vorbei und eilt dann dem Walde zu. Einige Zeit herrscht auf der Bühne ein unheimliches Schweigen.)

L.I.
D.U.
Piu mosso. (♩ = 112)
te.
ihr.
Piu mosso. (♩ = 112)

f *mf*

Schweigen.)

D. 2. The 'delirium scene', act II, v. s. p. 134-139

434 (La Falena snoda la chioma.)
(Die Falene löst ihr Haar.)

S. va - re que - ste ma - ni...
blut - ge Hand mir vor - sehen!

La Falena. Die Falene.
Le chio - me son lu - e...
Welch soll - sam Ver - lan - gen,
Lac - qua zam - pil - la.
doch ich ge - währ' es.

(Ella rimuove con
(Sie rückt mit dem

Il piede un sasso e ne sgorga all' improvviso una sorgente.)
Fuß einen Stein weg und sogleich quillt helles Wasser aus dem Boden.)
Stellio.

(Stellio s'inginocchia tenendo nelle
(Stellio kniet nieder und wäscht

mani le chiome e incomincia con quelle a lavarsi.)
sich mit den Flechten Redens seine Hände.)

S. mor del - la bel - la le ma - ni le
schwim - de auf im - mer, du Blut - mal oer -

ma - ni vim - mer - go...
schwim - de, ver - ge - he!

I suoi ca - pel - li si ric - chi vi
In dunkle Nacht nun ver - sin - ke, so

J.F. 1325

L.F.
D.F.

S.

Fa pre-sto... Im-pa-zien-te son di ca-
O kom-me! Mei-ne Lieb' er-schüt dei-re

pu - sa - no cu - nie fo - bli - o...
hül - le - schmerz, wie die - se Flech - ken!

L.F.
D.F.

S.

Andante sostenuto. (♩ 50)

roz - ze u bi - ci.
Fen - er - küs - se!

(lavandosi)

Ma non va vi - a! Ma non va vi - a!
Es ist ner-geb-lich! Das Blut nicht schwindet!

Arch.

Andante sostenuto. (♩ 50)

cresc.

S.

la - vo, la - vo, la - vo. Oh rab - bia! o do - men - zo fa - ti - ca!
mù - los al - les Wä - schen! Ver - dau - n - aus Ach die grüß - che Ma - he!

La Falena. Die Falene.

S.

Fa pre-sto!
So ei - te!...

E non va vi - a!
Es ist ner-geb-lich!

p espressivo

Nella crescente angoscia di Stelio, gli sembra una fiavole voce di pianto sorgere dalle recondite lontananze del bosco e avanzare più forte, sempre con misteriosa ambascia. Stelio balza in piedi e ascolta. La Falena gli si forma di fronte.

J. F. 1325.

Während Stelios Verzweiflung immer größer wird, ist es ihm, als höre er aus der Richtung des Waldes ein leises Weinen, das allmählich immer näher klingend stärker vornehmlich wird. Stelio fährt zusammen und horcht. Die Falene tritt auf ihn zu.

136

L.F.
D.F.

S.

U-na vo-ce...
Ei-ne Stim-me...

Tu a-scol-li la not-te mu-ta
Ganz still ist die Nacht und laut-los.

lo ti ten-do le
Lau-sche nur mei-nen

No... u-na vo-ce si duo-le... Ten-di fo-ree-chio...
Nein, ei-ne Stim-me, sie kla-ger! Las-se mich lau-schen!

brac-cia! lo ti ten-do le brac-cia! E trag-hial be-riil
Wör-ten! Mein Ver-lan-gen dich ru-fet! Nur das Un-bräuscht im

Giun-ge dal-la fo-re-sta...
Deutsch löst sich vom Wal-de.

ven-to. E il tuo de-bo-le cuo-re che si fa
Win-de, Nur dem le-ben-gen der Her-zug, der nicht dich

No! Son la - gri-me!
Nein, ein Hil - fe - ruf!

p espress.

J. F. 1315.

L.F.
D.F.

vi - le e pian-ge!
so er - zül-tern!

S.

Siap-pres-sa ga-me-bon-da... smar-ri - ta... Oh, co - me
Es nicht schon, lei-se kla-ge-nd, er - ster-bend. O, welch ein

(interrompendolo)
(ihn unterbrechend)

Ta - ci!
Schwei-ge!

(precipitandosi su lui)
(sich auf ihn stürzend)

No, non è ve - ro!...
Nein, es ist Täu-schung!

ge - me! È la vo - ce di... È la vo - ce d'Al - bi - na!
Schluch-zen! Jetzt er-kenn ich sie. Ach, die Stim - me Al - bi - nas!

espress.

p

L.F.
D.F.

Gu - di, go - di an - co-ra!
Schwel - ge! Schwel - ge in Won-ne!

S.

Ah! il tuo canto! il tuo vi - no... Mi con-du - cia ro-vi - na...
Ach, dei-ne Küs-se dein Sing-en! Willst du ganz mich ver-richten?

p

S.

È lei!
Sie ist!

È lei!
Sie ist!

Tim-plo - ro...
Er - bar-me dich!

p

m.s.

cresc.

J.E. 1325.

in sol mo-men-to che io a-scol-ti! O cuor pre-sa-go! Al-
und nur ein we-nig laß mich lau-schen... ich hör' mit Ban-gen Al-

La Falena. Die Falene.

Vie-ni!... Fug-gia - - mo all' i - so-la dai mon-ti az -
Flieh'n wir; ver-lok - - kend winkt sie dort die rei-ten-de

bi - - - na!
bi - - - na!

zur-ri... quel-la vo-ce di pian-to non ci rag-giun-ge-rà... Cor-ria-mo al so-gni! Vie-
Fer-ne! Je-ne Slim-me der Kla-gedringt dort nicht mehr zu dir Die Lie-be ruft dich: kom-

(Cerca di trascinarlo; egli cede lentamente.)
(Sie sucht ihn mit sich fortzuziehen; er folgt halb willenslos.)

Stellio.

Dim - - mi... dove an-
Sag mir, wo hin

(trascinandolo via)
(thun fortziehend)

L.F.
D.F.

E co-sì va - - sto il mon - do!
Die Welt ist tot und end - los!

S.

dia - mo?
flieh wir?

Non ces-se-rà quel
Mir fol-get je - ne

mf

L.F.
D.F.

Vien! fuggiam! fuggia - mo!
Komm, o komm ent-flieh wir!

(con disperazione)
(in Verzweiflung)

S.

pian - - to.
Stim - - me!

È lei, ti di-co, è lei.
Sie ist es, sie selbst!

un poco trattenendo

cresc.

ms.

(Escono in un'agitazione estrema.)
(Beide fliehen in höchster Erregung.)

L.F.
D.F.

Vien! fuggiam! fuggia - - - - mo!
Komm! Ent-flieh, ent-flieh wir!

S.

fuggiam! fuggia - - - - mo!
Ent-flieh, ent-flieh wir!

(Cala la tela. Der Vorhang fällt.)

pp cresc.

ff

Fine dell' Atto II^{do}. Ende des 2. Aufzuges.

J. E. 1325.

APPENDIX E – *Oceana* – music examples

E. 1. Sea nocturne, act II, Prelude, v. s. p. 113-114

113

Allegro moderato. $\text{♩} = 100$

PIANO.

p

cresc.

f dimin.

114

muscato marcato

mf *mf*

p

espress.

This musical score consists of six systems of piano notation, each with a treble and bass staff joined by a brace. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system (measures 114-115) features a melodic line in the treble staff with slurs and a bass line with chords. The second system (measures 116-117) continues the melodic development with slurs and ties. The third system (measures 118-119) shows a more active bass line with eighth-note patterns. The fourth system (measures 120-121) includes a melodic phrase in the treble staff marked 'espress.' (espressivo). The fifth system (measures 122-123) features a melodic line in the treble staff with slurs. The sixth system (measures 124-125) continues the melodic development with slurs and ties. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *p* (piano).

E. 2. Undine's dance, act II, v. s. p. 164 – 174

164

(Init fa un cenno al mare, lanciandovi una scaglia della sua veste)
 (Ist gibt den Wogen ein Zeichen, sodann wirft er eine Schuppe seines Gewandes in dieselben)

don!
 Lohn! (con gioia)
 (jubelnd)

l' avrò!
 O Glück

mf *stacc.* *p* *mf*

(Le onde del mare saltellano verso la riva sotto una luce più intensa, mandano e rimandano fra gli scogli appaiono così
 (Die Wellen strömen blendende Lichter aus und fliessen gegen den Strand, zwischen den Felsen erscheinen immer mehr und mehr Nixen von betörender Schönheit, mit Silberhaar und grünen Gewändern, sie tanzen.)

dim. *p*

Allegro. $\text{♩} = 92$

vissime di vaghe ondine dalle trecce argenteo, falva e verdognole, fanno balzare dalle spume, in una sorte di danza, le
 mehr Nixen von betörender Schönheit, mit Silberhaar und grünen Gewändern, sie tanzen.)

più fulgide perle)

stacc.

Soprani.

p

Spet - ta - co - lo
O run - der - bar

stacc.

stra - no e gio con - do
herr - li - cher An - blick,

stacc.

su
die

cre - ste di flut ti rim - bal - za - no
flie - hen den Wet - len um - gau - kein

Contralti.

p

A gio - stra le per - lo le
vom ko - sen - den Wind - hauch ge -

166

Vo - glio - se d'a - scen - - der le
die Per - len des sil - - ber - - nen

goc - - ce
tra - - - gen

Soprani.
roc - ce!
Schau-mes!

m.s.

stacc.

mp

First system of musical notation for piano, measures 1-3. The right hand features a continuous eighth-note pattern, while the left hand provides a steady bass accompaniment.

Second system of musical notation for piano, measures 4-6. The right hand continues the eighth-note pattern, with a *stacc.* marking above the first measure.

Third system of musical notation, measures 7-9. It includes a vocal line for Contraltos (labeled 'Contralti.' and '2da') and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: 'La spi - ra del vor - ti - ce' and 'Die rau - schenden Wir - bel sie'. The piano part includes a *stacc.* marking and a *p* (piano) dynamic marking.

Fourth system of musical notation, measures 10-12. It includes a vocal line with lyrics: 'ton - do A mil - le le af - son - da, le ag - gi - ral' and 'stn - gen den fröh - li chen Rei - gen zum Tön - ze!'. The piano part includes a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking.

Fifth system of musical notation for piano, measures 13-15. The right hand continues the eighth-note pattern, with a *f* (forte) dynamic marking in the second measure.

468

Seppari. 2 di

Cont: sti 1st Le scor - ta su col - li di
die ei - ten - de, flu - ten - de

su - gli er - ti ma - ci - gni lo por - ta
 Die rif - fi - ge Fels - wand um - bran - det

p

1st
 ci - gni, Le in - vol - ve a ru - i - na nei grem - bo d'un nem - bo di
 He - ge und schmückt sie mit blit - zen - den Sohle - ern, die sprü - hend sich

stacc.

li - qui - da pol - - - - - ve.
 sen - ken und he - - - - - len!

f

Poco più tranquillo. $\text{♩} = 80$

Tenori. (voci nel mare)
(Stimmen im Meere)

O stil - leop
 Ihr Pur - pur -

f p

per-le cor-ria - - no al-le noz-ze del rù!
 too-gen be - will - kommt nun die hol-des-te Braut!

cresc. *mf* *p*

p *f* *p*

p *stacc.*

Soprani.
 Mi - ra - co - lo! Mi -
 O - un - der - bar o

470

ra - co - lo! Bian - ca una per - la sor - ge dal
 wun - der - bar! scht ei - ne Per - le schwe - bet em -

Clui - do a - bi - ta - co - lo.
 par aus dem Meer - res - grand!

Contralti:

Mi - ra - bi - le ve - der - la!
 O wun - der - ba - rer An - blick!

Init.

Co - gli - la, svel - ta on - di - na!
 Pflü - cke sie, du Un - di - ne!

mf espress. 3 *p* *cresc. poco animando*

Contralti. I^o Tempo. ♩ = 92

p La Sic

Soprani.

E'l mar che por - ge! O stel - la
Des Me - vres Klei - nod! O hel - les

co - gli - o
fissat sie! O ste - la
O hel - les

cresc.

Ers.

O a - go - gna - to, te sor!
Mein ist der herr - lich - ste Schatz!

Sopr.
Contr.

O - ce - a - ni - na!
Stern - bild der Flu - then!

(Un'ondina finalmente, candida, snella, tutta vaghezza, riesce a ghermire una perla e ad afferare la sponda e si avvanza con divini passi verso Init e Nersa, tenendo alta come un faro la margherita conquistata.)
(Eine Nixe endlich, die an Schönheit und Anmut alle ndern überragt, hascht aus dem schäumenden Wogenkumme eine Perle und nähert sich, den strahlenden Schatz in der hocherhobenen Hand haltend, mit feierlichen Schritten Init und Nersa.)

Sopr.
Contr.

D'on - da cri - stal - loe fior!
Scht, wie das Klei - - nod strahlt!

dim. *p*

(Init indica alla sposa di farne dono ad Ers, onde questi, splendente e
(Init bedeutet Herza Ers die Perle zu überreichen; er empfängt sie strahlend.)
Init. (a mezza voce)

Tu ad Ers la do - - na
Reich dem Ers die Per - - le.

p

raggiante, apre le braccia ad accoglierla e la stringe.)
(end vor Freude und drückt sie triumphierend an's Herz.)

ch'hai si va - go stu - por, dol - ce re - gi - - na!
die an Schön - heit ihr gleicht, hol - des - te Kön' - - gin!

p

(Ers alternamente stringe l'ondina e bacia la perla.)
(Ers nuornt abwechselnd die Undine und küsst die Perle.)

p

Ers. 173

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of four systems of music. The first system begins with a vocal line in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system features a vocal line in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The fourth system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *cresc.*, *p*, and *stacc.*.

Sie-te mie! sie-te mi-e! Be-a-to chi vi
Ihr seid mein, mein für im-mer! der euch er-schuf, den

fe-ce poi-chè vi strin-go al fin!
preis' ich, da ihr mein Ei-gen seid!

U-na mi-
Gleich ei-nem

mi-sco-la lu-na splen-der mi pa-re in man-e
bin-ken-den Ster-ne glänzt du in mei-ner Hand o

479

de le mie brac - cia fo cu - na a un e - - sta - si de
See - le des Meer - es ich hal - te und pres - - se dich an

(schludendo a Nersa le braccia)
(gegen Nersa die Arme ausbreitend)
Init.
Poco più tranquillo. $\text{♩} = 80$
Gl'im - pe - ti suoi la -
Viel ver - heis - sen - de
Io - - - ce - - an!
mei - - - ne Brust!

E. 3. Sea spell, act II, v. s. p. 189 - 198

(con la mano stesa su l'acqua)
(Streckt die Hand gegen die See aus)

189

Init.

Il con-si-glio è cru - del! O - ra l'ac-cet - to! A voi Si - re - ni
Obauch grausam der Rat, bleibt mir kein Aus - weg! Her-bei Si - re - nen.

(Init traccia un'altra cabala su l'acqua, indi si rituffa e sparisce in mare)
(Init warft abermals ein Zeichen gegen das Meer, taucht dann in den Fluthen unter und
er verschwindet.)

Andante sostenuto. ♩ = 58

l'in - can - to - si-mo!
stim - met an den Sang!

(Es si appiatta a sinistra fra gli scogli; Uscidetto. Un gran si-
gnorino riposa per un momento su l'acqua, indi voi lo vedete
sporgersi ed elevarsi dagli schisti, or più forte or più timidamente,
che Sereas ascolta con paura terrore insuperchita. La navicella
avanza ancora un po', indi si arresta.)

(Es legt sich links auf die Felsen nieder. Es zurücksch-
ten, einen Augenblick herrscht tiefe, fast todt-
stille; sodann, erhebt sich bald stärker bald schwächer Stimmen von
berückender Schönheit aus den Abgründen.)

100

Sopr.
2^{di} Gruppi.

Contr.

(alcune voci ass. fiedl)
(einige Stimmen z. d. der See)

Ve-ni - ste chia -
her-bei all' ier

dim. *p*

ma - - te, so - rel - le, da l'om - bra ve - ni-ste chia -
Sche - - stern aus Schün-den und Tie - - fen. her bei all' ier

ma - te dal cen-no d'un Di - - ol -
Scharstern des Machtwort des Königs euch ru - fet!

ve - ni - ste!
ihr Sche - - stern!

Ve - ni - ste chia - ma - - te, so - rel - lo, da
 Her - bei all' ihr Schwe - stern aus Schrinden und

l'om - - bra su l'ac - que dal cen - no d'un di - o!
 Tie - - sen, das Machtwort des Königs euch ru - - fe!
 so - rel - - le!
 ihr Schwe - - stern!

Sopr. Cantiam nuo-tan - do o bel - la vo - la ad - dor - men - ta - to il ven -
 1st Gruppi. O, lasst uns sin - gen, die Was - ser ru - hen, kein Hauch be - we - get die Flu -
 Contr. Cantiam nuo-tan - do o bel - la vo - la ad - dor - men - ta - to il ven -
 O lasst uns sin - gen, die Was - ser ru - hen, kein Hauch be - we - get die Flu -

192

o,
 then,
 to,
 then,
 l'ad-dor-men - - - ta!
 se - lig träu - - - me!
 l'ad - dor - men - - - ta!
 schlaf und träu - - - me!
 Nersa.
 È co - mo u-na ca - rez - za
 O welch' ein süs-ses Ko - - son!
 2^{da}
 Ar-di - to noc -
 Fer - re - ge - ner
 dim.
 p

193

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of several systems of staves. The vocal parts are for Soprano (Sopr.) and Contralto (Contr.). The piano accompaniment is written for the right and left hands. The lyrics are in both Italian and German.

System 1:

Sopr. chie - ro che po - schi con l'a - vi - do guar - do ne
 Contr. Fer - ge, dess Schiff - tein die leuch - ten - den Wo - gen des

System 2:

Sopr. flut - ti d'ar gen - - to
 Contr. Mre - res durch - schnei - - del

System 3:

Sopr. bon - do deh! cre - di che l'oo - chio do -
 Contr. su - chest, doch trü - ge - risch gleisst nur die

System 4:

Sopr. Se un cor - po di don - - na tu scor - gi er - ra bon - -
 Contr. sie spie - geln dir wie - - der das Bild das du su -

194

li - ra!
Hil - lei!

do, deh! Cro - di che l'oc - chio do - li - ra!
chest, doch trü - ge - risch gleisst nur die Hil - le!

Noi sia - mo un can - to e il no - stro cor - po è un'a - ni - ma di
Wir all sind der Schn - sucht nie ru - hender Geist der die Will - en durch -

Deh! cro - di che l'oc - chio do -
Doch trü - ge - risch spielt nur die

Nersa.
E si per - de il noc - chio - ro!
Ach sie lo - cken das O - her!

(Uls esce dagli acogli)
(Uls kommt aus den Felsen hervor)

Uls.
Il vuoi tu
Soll ich tån

Quest' al - ma fo -
O folg' uns' - rem

Quest' al - ma fo -
O folg' uns' - rem

li - ra.
wan - dert.

li - ra!
Hil - lei!

La mia vi - ta o' lo sal - - va!
 Nimm mein Le - ben, doch reiß' - ihn!

sal - - vo?
 reiß' - - - - - ten?

La tua vi - ta non
 Die-ser Preis ist zu

mi - - ne - a di li - ra ha in - nu - - me - - ri
 Lock - ge - sang, er führt dich in schwei - - gen - - - do

mi - - ne - a di li - ra ha in nu - - me - - ri
 Lock - ge - sang, er führt dich in schwei - - gen - - - do

No, mi - se - ri -
 Nein, Mit - leid ver -

vù! Tu l'a - - mi?
 hoch, du liebst ihn?

cor - - - do ne! bo - schi d'al gi - ne:
 Tie - - - fen, o sàu me nicht, Schif - fer!

cor - - - do ne! bo - schi d'al gi - ne:
 Tie - - - fen, o sàu - me nicht, Schif - fer!

196

N. cor - - - dia di lui m'an go - - - - - scia!
die - - - - - not sein har - tes Schick - - - - - sal!
di -
dich

Uls. (accennando la nave)
(auf die Barke zeigend)
Lo sal - - va
O rett' - - - - - ian,
Ad l - nit fai tu ri - nun - zia?
Doch I - nit willst du ent - sa - gen?
seen - di - - - - - noc - chie - ro ne - gli al - - vi del mar
ru - sel - - - - - der Tie - fen ge - heim - - nis - voll we -
di - seen - di noc - chie - ro ne - gli al vi del mar sen - za
mit uns zu ver - sta - ken, die dich nol - ler Scha - sucht er.
dim.

197

La sul - va, ihu.
Sul mar ven-de-ta mi-a, e - vo - la, ai-ron-do l'a - ni -
O Meer sei du mein Rührer, ent-fess - le der Wü-ste Stür - mes.

Di - scen - di, noc - chio - ro ne-gli-al - vi del
Mit uns zu ver - sta - ken die d'ah - rol - ler

sen-za fi - ne di - scen - di!
bender Zau - ber, ver - sta - ken!

fi - ne, di - scen - di!
war - ten, ver - sta - ken!

mal wüth!
mar sen-za fi - nel Di - scen - di!
Sehn-sucht er - war - ten! Ver - sta - ken!

Di - scen - di noc - chio - ro ne-gli-al - vi del mar!
Ver - sta - ken, o Schif - fer, ver - sta - ken mit uns!

Di - scen - di!
Ver - sta - ken!

Di - scen - di noc - chio - ro ne-gli-al - vi del mar!
Ver - sta - ken, o Schif - fer, mit uns!

trinc.

198

(Scagli un sasso nel mare. Gridano le Sirene e si scompigliano)
 (Er schleudert einen Stein ins Meer, die Sirenen schrien auf und entfliehen)

Ah!
Ah!

Ah!
Ah!

Ah!
Ah!

Ah!
Ah!

APPENDIX F – *Abisso* – music examplesF. 1. Table 1. *Abisso*, act II, Gisca's monologue or "aria della face"

Vocal score p. 92-96. Libretto p. 32-33; followed by the beginning of the 'priest' scene, v. s. p. 97.

Text	Verses	Music structure	Motifs
		A (brief interlude) <i>Andante sostenuto</i>	Motif of 'scream' Motif of 'Gisca'
Il nembo della gioia s'allontana! Io sono il fior de l'orto abbandonato! Io son la schiava che hanno flagellato Con sue catene, e il core non m'è morto! Io che fui muta, immota, or vibro e <i>grido</i> Dietro il nembo d'amor che s'allontana!...	I	B	Motif of 'scream'
O turbine che schianti, Per te non ero nata! O casa mia In Alpe! O vecchio nonno! Perché ucciso Non ho colui che da voi mi strappò?	II	C (brief interlude)	Motif of 'capanna'
Perché giurai, e non feci? Perché Da quando prima mi sciolsi languida Ne'l violento amplesso, io fui l'amore De'l mio signor, l'amore che non lascia Mai, che invillisce, e si strugge, e si danna A esser confitto su tutte le croci, Ad ascoltare fra le mille voci Quella che pur lo illuse e ancor lo inganna, A restar solo in sua notturna ambascia? Egli non mi ama più... Egli ama Mariela che spregiò... Io sono nel suo cor come questa consunta Face che fumigando oscuramente cola... Ella è la sua canzon che ne la notte vola... La canzon che rinasce perpetua da'l suo foco. Io muoio a poco a poco, su te, face defunta...	III	<i>Un poco animando</i> <i>Un poco più mosso</i> <i>Primo tempo</i> A (Interlude) "B" C (as a brief postlude)	Motif of 'scream'

F. 2. Gisca's aria, v. s. p. 92-96

92

32 suoi ultimi scoppi getta sprazzi intermittenti nella sala quasi buia. Gisca è sola, a terra, nel suo tormento.)
Andante sostenuto. ♩ = 66.

G. *Andante sostenuto. ♩ = 66.*

chia - ma! Ma-rie-la! Ma-rie-la!

f *dim.* *p*

G. Il nem - - bo de la gio - ia s'al-lon - ta - na! Io so-no il

f *p*

G. fior de l'or - to ab - ban - do - na to! Io son _____ la schiava che han - no - flà - gel -

p *cresc.* *dim.*

G. la - to con sue ca - te - ne e il co-re non mi è mor - - - to!

p *cresc.*

G. Io che fui _____ mu - ta im-mo - ta, or vi - bro e

p *cresc.*

G. 33 gri - do die-tro il nem - bo da-mor che s'al-lon - ta - - - na...

G. O tur-bi-ne che schian-ti, per te non e - ro na - la!

34 Gisca.
O ca-sa mi - a in al - - pe! O vec-chio

Viol. *stacc.*

Corno ingl. e Clar.

G. non - no! Per-chè uc - ci - so non ho co - lui che da voi mi strap-

dim.

94

35

Un poco animando.

G. *pò? Per-chè giurai e nol fe - ci? Per-chè da quan-do pri - ma mi sciol-si*
Un poco animando.

G. *lan-gui-da nel vi-o-len-to am-ples-so, io fui l'a-mo-re del mio si-*
dim.

36 *Un poco più mosso.*

G. *gnor, l'a-mo-re che non la-scia mai, che in-vi-*
Un poco più mosso.

G. *li-sce e si strug-ge e si dan-na a es-ser in-flit-to su tut-te le*

G. *cro-ci ad a-scol-ta-re fra le mil-le vo-ci quel-la che pur lo il-*
Prima tempo.
Prima tempo.
ritard. dim.

G. *la - se e an - cor lo in - gan - na, a re - star so - lo in sua not - tur - na am -*

G. *ba - 'scia? Ei più non m'a - ma E -*

G. *glia - ma Ma - rie - la che spre - giò.*

G. 37 *lo so - - no nel suo cor co - me que - sta con - sun - ta*

G. *fa - ce che fu - mi - gan - do co - scu - ra - men - te co - la...*

96

G.

G.

G.

G.

F. 3. Abisso, act II, the ‘priest’ scene, v. s. p. 97

97

(La porta di fondo si apre cautamente.)

cresc.

Il frate.

A - ni - ma, dor - mi?

Allegro moderato. M.M. ♩ = 116.

39 *Allegro moderato. M.M. ♩ = 116.*

Animando.

Allegro moderato. M.M. ♩ = 116.

Chi se - i? Don - de vie - ri? Chi fin-

vi - a? Co-me stug - gi - sti a le scol - te? Sei fi - - glio de le

cresc. molto - dim.

te - ne - bre o del fu - mo? ve - mo - rio fug - gi!

dim.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abruzzese, Alberto, ed. 1982. *L'età del decadentismo e della crisi. Storia e antologia della letteratura italiana*, 19. Florence: La Nuova Italia Editore.
- Adams, Robert M. 1968. "The Operatic Novel: Joyce and D'Annunzio". In *New Looks at Italian Opera: Essays in Honour of Donald J. Grout*. Edited by William W. Austin. New York: Cornell University Press, 260 - 281.
- Andree, Rolf. 1977. *Arnold Böcklin: Die Gemälde*. With contributions from Alfred Berner, Giorgio de Chirico, Hans Holenweg [et al.]. Munich: Prestel - Verlag.
- Andree, Rolf. 1971. *Introduction to Arnold Böcklin 1827 - 1901*, an exhibition organized by the Arts Councils of Great Britain and Pro Helvetia Foundation of Switzerland, 20 May - 27 June 1971, Hayward Gallery, London.
- Antolini, Bianca Maria. 1997. "L'Editoria musicale in Italia negli anni di Puccini". In *Giacomo Puccini: l'uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo: atti del convegno internazionale di studi su Giacomo Puccini nel 70 anniversario della morte*. Edited by G. Ravenni and C. Gianturco. Studi Musicali Toscani, 4. Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 329 - 359.
- Avins, Syra, select. and trans. 1997. *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*. Translated with the assistance of Josef Eisinger. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barblan, Guglielmo. 1972. *Toscanini e la Scala*. Milan: Edizioni della Scala.
- Barnaby, Paul. 1997. "From Giacinta to Rassegnazione: the Critique of Post-Risorgimento Ideologies in the Novels of Luigi Capuana". University of Edinburgh Ph. D thesis.
- Barsotti, Anna. 1978. "Il 'teatro di poesia' ". In *Rivista Italiana di Drammaturgia* 9-10, 15-59.
- Benco, Silvio. n. d. *Abisso: dramma lirico in 3 atti*. Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno.
- Benco, Silvio. n. d. *Trieste tra '800 e '900 una città tra due secoli*. Bologna: Massimo Boni Editore.
- Benco, Silvio. 1897. *La Falena: leggenda in tre atti*. Trieste: Tipografia Augusto Levi.
- Benco, Silvio. 1901. *Oceana: commedia fantastica*. With title page illustrated by R. Carbonara. Venice: Officine Grafiche C. Ferrari.
- Benco, Silvio. 1902-3. *Oceana: commedia fantastica*. Teatro Alla Scala, Stagione di Carnevale - Quaresima 1902-1903. With title page illustrated by R. Carbonara. Milan: Paolo Mariani Editore. Original edition, Venice: Officine Grafiche C. Ferrari, 1901.
- Benco, Silvio. 1903. *La fiamma fredda*. Milan: Fratelli Treves Editori.
- Benco, Silvio. 1911. *Il castello dei desideri*. 2nd ed. Milan: Fratelli Treves Editori.
- Benco, Silvio. 1921. *Nell'atmosfera del sole*. Milan: Casa Editrice Risorgimento.

- Benco, Silvio. 1922. *La corsa del tempo*. Edited by Umberto Saba. 2nd ed. Trieste: Casa Editrice Parnaso.
- Benco, Silvio. 1928. *La Falena: leggenda in tre atti*. 4th ed. Trieste: Arti grafiche L. Smolars.
- Benco, Silvio. 1946. *Contemplazione del disordine*. Udine: Del Bianco Editore.
- Benco, Silvio. 1968. *Ricordi di Antonio Smareglia*. Trieste: Edizioni Umana.
- Benco, Silvio. 1974a. *Scritti musicali di Silvio Benco*. Edited by Gianni Gori and Isabella Gallo. Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore.
- Benco, Silvio. 1974b. *Teatro: L'uomo malato; La bilancia*. Introduction by Roberto Scrivano. Rome: Bulzoni Editore.
- Benco, Silvio. 1977. *Scritti di critica letteraria e figurativa*. Edited by Oliviero H. Bianchi, Bruno Maier and Sauro Pesante. Trieste: Edizioni Lint.
- Bertazzoli, Raffaella. 1987. "La Figlia di Iorio da Michetti a D'Annunzio". In *Annali d'Italianistica* 5, 161-177.
- Bianchi, Honoré Oliviero. 1956. "Rimpiano di Silvio Benco". In *Inediti triestini*. Trieste: Associazione Italiana per le Biblioteche, 35-38.
- Bianconi, Lorenzo and Giorgio Pestelli. 1987. *Storia dell'opera Italiana*. 6 vols. Turin: EDT Musica.
- Bianconi, Lorenzo and Giorgio Pestelli, eds. 1998. *Opera Production and its Resources*. Trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane. The History of Italian Opera, part II, vol. 4. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bobbio, Norberto. 1948. *The Philosophy of Decadentism: A Study in Existentialism*. Translated by D. Moore. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Botstein, Leon. 1990-91. "Brahms and 19th-Century Painting". In *19th Century Music* 14/2, 154-168.
- Budden, Julian. 1992. "La Giovane Scuola". In *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Edited by Stanley Sadie, vol. 2, 428-429.
- Budden, Julian. 1992. *The Operas of Verdi*, revised ed., 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press: Calendon Paperbacks.
- Budden, Julian. 1987. "Wagnerian Tendencies in Italian opera". In *Music and Theatre: Essays in Honour of Winton Dean*. Edited by Nigel Fortune. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 299-332.
- Busch, Hans, ed. and trans. 1997. *Verdi's "Falstaff" in Letters and Contemporary Reviews*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Carner, Mosco. 1992. *Puccini: A Critical Biography*. 3rd ed. London: Duckworth.

- Carter, A. E. 1958. *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature: 1830 - 1900*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Cavallini, Ivano. 1995. "La frontiera interiore di Antonio Smareglia". In *Atti*, 25. Rovigno: Centro di ricerche storiche, Unione Italiana Fiume and Università popolare Trieste, 241-264.
- Cavallini, Ivano. 1999. "La musica di tre culture, tre culture per una musica: appunti in luogo di premessa". In *Cosmopolitismo e nazionalismo nella musica a Trieste tra ottocento e novecento: studi offerti a Vito Levi*. Edited by Ivano Cavallini e Paolo Da Col. Quaderni del Conservatorio "G. Tartini" di Trieste. Trieste: University of Trieste, 5-15.
- Charlton, David, ed. 1989. *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings: "Kreisleriana", "The poet and the composer", Music Criticism*. Trans. by Martyn Clarke. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coceani, Bruno. 1973. "Ricordo di Silvio Benco nel primo centenario della nascita". In *La Porta Orientale* 11-12, November - December, 238 - 246.
- Comune di Grado. 1979. Antonio Smareglia. In memoriam.
- Conati, Marcello and Mario Medici, eds. 1994. *The Verdi-Boito Correspondence*. Translated and edited by William Weaver. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Corazzol, Adriana Guarnieri. 1993. "'Fatte un chiasso da demoni colle palme e coi talloni!': la disgregazione dei livelli di cultura nell'opera italiana tra Ottocento e Novecento". In *Opera and libretto II*. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore.
- Corazzol, Adriana Guarnieri. 1995. "Scrittori-Librettisti e Librettisti-Scrittori tra Scapigliatura e Decadence (Ghislanzoni, Praga, Fontana, Leoncavallo)". In *Letteratura, Musica e Teatro al tempo di Ruggiero Leoncavallo: atti del secondo convegno internazionale di studi su Ruggero Leoncavallo*. Edited by Lorenza Guiot e Jürgen Maehder. Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno, 11-40.
- Corvetto, Rita. 1973. "Silvio Benco narratore". University of Lecce graduation thesis.
- Criscione, Caterina and Learco Andalò, eds. 1995. *Mascagni ritrovato. 1863 - 1945: l'uomo, il musicista*. Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno.
- Crivelli, Renzo S. 1996. *Itinerari Triestini. James Joyce = Triestine itineraries*. Trieste: MGS Press.
- D'Amico, Fedele. 1980. "Antonio Smareglia". In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Edited by Stanley Sadie, vol. 17, 387-388.
- D'Annunzio, Gabriele. 1907. *Più che l'amore: tragedia moderna in due episodi preceduta da un discorso e accresciuta d'un preludio d'un intermezzo e d'un esodio*. Milan: Fratelli Treves editori.
- D'Annunzio, Gabriele. 1920. *La figlia di Iorio: tragedia pastorale*. Milan: Fratelli Treves editori.

- D'Annunzio, Gabriele. 1966. *Poesie; Teatro; Prose*. Edited by M. Praz and F. Gerra. La letteratura italiana, storia e testi, 62. Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore.
- D'Annunzio, Gabriele. 1981. *Favole mondane*. Introduction by Federico Roncoroni. Milan: Garzanti.
- D'Annunzio, Gabriele. 1999. *Lettere ai Treves*. Edited by Gianni Oliva. Milan: Garzanti.
- Daverio, John. 1997. *Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age"*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Del Principe, David. 1996. *Rebellion, Death, and Aesthetics in Italy: the Demons of Scapigliatura*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press.
- Dombroski, Robert. 1996. "Writer and Society in the New Italy (1870-1910)". In *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 457-479.
- Donorà, Luigi. 1982. *Antonio Smaiegli: cenni biografici*. Bologna.
- Ellmann, Richard. 1982. *James Joyce*. New and revised edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Elwert, W. Th. 1973. *Versificazione italiana dalle origini ai giorni nostri*. Translated from German by the author, 2nd ed. Florence: Felice le Monnier.
- Favetta, Bianca Maria. 1961. *Preziosi autografi al Museo Teatrale triestino*. Trieste. [the text was first published as an article in *La Porta Orientale* 11-12, 1960].
- Fifield, Christopher. 1993. *True Artist and True Friend: A Biography of Hans Richter*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Flora, Francesco. 1957. *Celebrazione di Silvio Benco*. Introduction by Raffaele de Courten. Trieste: Circolo della cultura e delle arti.
- Franklin, Peter. 1991. *Mahler: Symphony no. 3*. Cambridge Music Handbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gatti, Carlo. 1964. *Il Teatro alla Scala nella storia e nell'arte: 1778 - 1963*, 2 vols. Milan: G. Ricordi.
- Gioanola, Elio. 1991. *Il decadentismo*. Rome: Edizioni Studium.
- Girardi Michele and Franco Rossi. 1989. *Il teatro La Fenice. Cronologia degli spettacoli 1792 - 1936*. Venice: Albrizzi Editore.
- Gruber Benco, Anna. 1950. "Le cartoline della domenica di Silvio Benco". In *Pagine Istriane*, 31-33.
- Gruber Benco, Anna. 1997. Interview by author, tape recording. Duino.
- Gruber Benco, Aurelia. 1952. *Dai "Ricordi di Smaiegli" di Silvio Benco*, unpublished, typescript 15 April 1952.

- Gruber Benco, Aurelia. 1956. "Silvio e Delia Benco". In *Inediti triestini*. Trieste: Associazione Italiana per le Biblioteche, 27-29.
- Gruber Benco, Aurelia. 1960. "Ricordo di Silvio Benco". In *L'Approdo Letterario* 9, Rome: Eri, 17-18.
- Gruber Benco, Aurelia. 1972. "Between Joyce and Benco". In *James Joyce Quarterly* 9/3. Tulsa: The University of Tulsa, 328 – 333.
- Grun, Bernard. 1970. *Gold and Silver: the Life and Times of Franz Lehár*. London: W. H. Allen.
- Guiot, Lorenza and Jürgen Maehder, eds. 1995. *Letteratura, musica e teatro al tempo di Ruggero Leoncavallo: atti del secondo convegno internazionale di studi su Ruggero Leoncavallo*, Locarno, October 1991. Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno.
- Hall, Robert A. jr. 1968. "Music in the Works of Fogazzaro". In *New Looks at the Italian Opera: Essays in Honour of Donald J. Grout*. Edited by William W. Austin. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Holloway, Robin. 1986. "Experiencing Music and Imagery in *Parsifal*". In *Richard Wagner: Parsifal*. The Royal Opera Guides Series, 34. Edited by Nicholas John. London: John Calder.
- Isotta, Paolo. 1978. *I sentieri della musica*. Milan: Mondadori.
- Kerman, Joseph. 1988. *Opera as Drama*. New and revised edition. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Kibler, Louis. 1987. "Myth and Meaning in D'Annunzio's *La figlia di Iorio*". In *Annali d'Italianistica* 5, 178-187.
- Kimbell, David. 1981. *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kimbell, David. 1991. *Italian Opera*. National traditions of opera series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Langham Smith, Richard, ed. and trans. 1977. *Debussy on Music*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Langham Smith, Richard. 1992. "Claude Debussy". In *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Edited by Stanley Sadie, vol. 1, 1098-1100.
- Levi, Vito. 1929. "Un grande operista italiano Antonio Smareglia (1854-1929)". In *Rivista Musicale Italiana* 36, 600-615.
- Levi, Vito. 1949. *Oceana di Antonio Smareglia: piccola guida attraverso l'opera*. Trieste: Casa Musicale Giuliana.
- Levi, Vito. 1956. "Antonio Smareglia e il doganiere". In *Inediti triestini*. Trieste: Associazione Italiana per le Biblioteche, 43-45.

- Levi, Vito, Guido Botteri and Ireneo Bremini. 1962. *Il Comunale di Trieste*. Udine: Del Bianco Editore.
- Levi, Vito. 1968. *La vita musicale a Trieste: cronache di un cinquantennio 1918-1968*. Collana celebrativa Trieste 1968, 3. Milan: All'insegna del pesce d'oro.
- Licinic, Juliana. 1998. "Antonio Smareglia i njegova opera *Istarska svadba*" [Antonio Smareglia and his Opera *Nozze istriane*]. University of Zagreb graduation thesis, published in *Arti musices* 26/2. Zagreb: Croatian Musicological Society and Department for History of Croatian Music, 175-215.
- Licinic, Juliana. 1999. "*Falena, Oceana, Abisso*: novità nel teatro musicale italiano a cavallo fra il XIX e XX secolo". In *In omaggio a Carlotta Grisi: primo convegno internazionale di musicologia* (Cittànova – Visinada, Settembre 1998). Edited by Ivana Paula Gortan - Carlin, 111-132.
- Linnenbach, Andrea. 1991. *Arnold Böcklin und die Antike. Mythos - Geschichte - Gegenwart*. Munchen: Hirmer Verlag.
- Loewenberg, Alfred. 1970. *Annals of Opera 1597 - 1940*. 2nd ed. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Maehder, Jürgen. 1988. "The origins of Italian *Literaturoper*: *Guglielmo Ratcliff, La figlia di Iorio, Parisina, and Francesca da Rimini*". In *Reading Opera*. Edited by Arthur Gross and Roger Parker. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 92-128.
- Maehder, Jürgen and Lorenza Guiot, eds. 1993. *Ruggero Leoncavallo nel suo tempo: atti del primo convegno internazionale di studi su Ruggero Leoncavallo*, Locarno, October 1993. Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno.
- Magnaguagno, Guido and Juri Steiner, eds. 1998. *Arnold Böcklin, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst. Eine Reise ins Ungewisse*. Bern: Benteli Verlag.
- Malipiero, Gian Francesco. 1997. *Il carteggio con Guido M. Gatti: 1914-1972*. Edited by Cecilia Palandri. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore.
- Mangini, Nicola. 1974. *I teatri di Venezia*. Milan: Mursia.
- Marsh, Jan. 1998. *Per-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite art*. 2nd ed. London: Phoenix and Illustrated.
- McColl, Sandra. 1998. "Richard Wallaschek: Vienna's Most Uncomfortable Music Critic". In *International Review of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 29/1, 41-73.
- Meier, B. and O. H. Bianchi, eds. 1968. *Scrittori triestini del novecento: antologia*. Trieste.
- Morelli, Giovanni, ed. 1994. *Arrigo Boito*. Venice: Leo S. Olschki.
- Morini, Mario, Marcel Prawy, et al. 1987. *Atti del primo convegno internazionale di studi su Pietro Mascagni*, Livorno, April 1985. Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno.
- Muscardin, Mara. 1972. "Il teatro di Silvio Benco". University of Padua graduation thesis.

- Mutterle, Anco Marzio. 1980. *Gabriele D'Annunzio: introduzione e guida allo studio dell'opera dannunziana*. Florence: Le Monnier.
- Nectoux, Jean – Michael. 1991. *Gabriel Faure: A Musical Life*. Trans. by Roger Nichols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nichols, Roger and Richard Langham Smith. 1989. *Claude Debussy: Pelléas et Mélisande*. Cambridge Opera Handbooks Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nicolaisen, Jay. 1980. *Italian Opera in Transition: 1871-1893*. Studies in Musicology, 31. Michigan: UMI Research Press.
- Nicolodi, Fiamma. 1984. *Musica e musicisti nel ventennio fascista*. Fiesole: Discanto Edizioni.
- Nordio, Mario. 1972. "My First English Teacher". In *James Joyce Quarterly* 9/3. Tulsa: The University of Tulsa, 323 – 325.
- Novel, Giuliana. 1999. " 'Visione musicalissima' e 'simbolo pittorico': 'La Falena' di Silvio Benco e Antonio Smareglia". In *Cosmopolitismo e nazionalismo nella musica a Trieste tra ottocento e novecento: studi offerti a Vito Levi*. Edited by Ivano Cavallini e Paolo Da Col. Quaderni del Conservatorio "G. Tartini" di Trieste. Trieste: University of Trieste.
- Oliva, Gianni. 1992. *D'Annunzio e la poetica d'invenzione*. Civiltà letteraria del '900. Milan: Mursia.
- Orselli, Cesare. 1996. "Antonio Smareglia: breve ipotesi di ricerca". In *Antonio Smareglia e 'I pittori fiamminghi': atti del convegno di studi su Antonio Smareglia*, Trieste, April 1991. Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno.
- Perpich, Edoardo. 1990. *Il teatro musicale di Antonio Smareglia*. Collana degli atti del Centro di Ricerche Storiche di Rovigno, 9. Trieste - Rovigno: Unione degli italiani dell'Istria – Università Popolare di Trieste.
- Pesante, Sauro. 1950. *Bibliografia di Silvio Benco*. Trieste: Tipografia Litografia Moderna.
- Phillips-Matz, Mary Jane. 1993. *Verdi: A Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pieri, Giuliana. 1998. "The Influence of English Pre-Raphaelitism in 19th-Century Italian Art and Literature". University of Oxford Ph. D. thesis.
- Pierrot, Jean. 1981. *The Decadent Imagination: 1880-1900*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Pontiero, Giovanni, trans. 1982. *Duse on Tour: Guido Noccioli's Diaries*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Potts, Willard, ed. 1969. *Portraits of the Artist in Exile. Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Prawy, Marcel. 1969. *The Vienna Opera*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Praz, Mario. 1933. *The Romantic Agony*. Translated from the Italian by Angus Davidson. London: Oxford University Press.

- Praz, Mario. 1951. *The Romantic Agony*. 2nd ed. Translated from the Italian by A. Davidson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Puffett, Derrick, ed. 1989. *Richard Strauss: Salome*. Cambridge Opera Handbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Putignano, Letizia. 1994. "Revival gotico e misticismo leggendario nel melodramma italiano postunitario." In *Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana* 1, 411-434.
- Radole, Giuseppe. 1988. *Ricerche sulla vita musicale a Trieste (1750-1950)*. Trieste: Edizioni Italo Svevo.
- Robinson, Herbert Spencer and Wilson, Knox. 1972. *The Encyclopedia of Myths and Legends of All the Nations*. London: Ed. Barbara L. Picard.
- Rocco – Bergera, Niny. 1972. "James Joyce and Trieste". In *James Joyce Quarterly* 9/3. Tulsa: The University of Tulsa, 342 – 352.
- Rubino, Azzo. 1939. "Antonio Smareglia e il rinnovamento dell'opera italiana". In *La Porta Orientale* 18, 411-430.
- Sacchi, Filippo. 1957. *The Magic Baton: Toscanini's Life for Music*. Translated by the author. London: Putnam.
- Sachs, Harvey. 1978. *Toscanini*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Sadie, Stanley, ed. 1996. *The New Grove Book of Operas*. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan Press.
- Salveti, Guido. 1996. "Il novecento italiano". In *Musica in scena: storia dello spettacolo musicale*, vol. 2, part 5. Edited by Alberto Basso.
- Sansone, Matteo. 1987. "Verismo from Literature to Opera". University of Edinburgh Ph. D. thesis.
- Sansone, Matteo. 1992a. "La Falena". In *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Edited by Stanley Sadie, vol. 2, 110-111.
- Sansone, Matteo. 1992b. "Oceana". In *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Edited by Stanley Sadie, vol. 3, 654.
- Sansone, Matteo. 1992c. "Antonio Smareglia". In *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Edited by Stanley Sadie, vol. 4, 417-418.
- Sansone, Matteo. 1997. "La dimensione decadente nel libretto di Tosca". In *Giacomo Puccini: l'uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo: atti del convegno internazionale di studi su Giacomo Puccini nel 70 anniversario della morte*. Studi musicali Toscani, 4. Edited by G. Ravenni e C. Gianturco. Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana Editrice, 111 –125.
- Sansone, Matteo. 2001. "Antonio Smareglia". In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Edited by Stanley Sadie, 2nd ed., vol. 23, 531-533.
- Schmidgall, Gary. 1977. *Literature as Opera*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Scrivano, Roberto, intro. 1974. Benco 1974 b.
- Shackelford, Rudy, trans. and ed. 1987. *Dallapiccola on Opera: Selected Writings of Luigi Dallapiccola*, vol. 1. Foreword by Antal Doráti. Musicians on music series, 4. Exeter: Toccata Press.
- Shafer, R. Murray. 1975. *E. T. A. Hoffmann and Music*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Shakespeare, William. 1999. *The Tempest*. Edited by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan. The Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series. Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons.
- Shakespeare, William. 1994. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Introduction by Peter Holland. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schuh, Willi. 1982. *Richard Strauss: A Chronicle of the Early Years 1864 - 1898*. Trans. by Mary Whittal. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smareglia, Antonio. [s. a]. *Abisso: dramma lirico in tre atti*. Orchestral score. The archive of Casa Musicale Sonzogno, Milan.
- Smareglia, Antonio. 1899[?]. *La Falena: leggenda drammatica in tre atti*. Orchestral score, manuscript copy by one of Smareglia's pupils. The archive of Casa musicale Sonzogno, Milan.
- Smareglia, Antonio. 1902. *Oceana: commedia fantastica in tre atti*. Reduction for voice and piano by Mario Smareglia. Leipzig: F. Hofmeister.
- Smareglia, Antonio. 1903. *Oceana: commedia fantastica*. Orchestral score, manuscript copy by one of Smareglia's pupils. The archive of Casa Musicale Sonzogno, Milan: Dell'Ateneo.
- Smareglia, Antonio. 1908. *La Falena: leggenda in tre atti*. Reduction for voice and piano by Mario Smareglia. 3rd ed. Leipzig: F. Hofmeister.
- Smareglia, Antonio. 1974. *Lettere*. Edited by Gianni Gori e Isabella Gallo. Naples: Edizioni dell'Ateneo.
- Smareglia, Antonio. 1990. *Abisso: dramma lirico in tre atti*. Reduction for voice and piano by Mario Smareglia. Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno.
- Smareglia, Ariberto. 1926. *Il teatro lirico nazionale negli ultimi 30 anni: il "Caso Smareglia" e il Teatro alla Scala*. Trieste: Libreria Minerva.
- Smareglia, Ariberto. 1936. *Vita ed arte di Antonio Smareglia: un capitolo di storia del teatro lirico italiano*. 2nd ed. Bellinzona: Arturo Salvioni & Co.
- Smareglia, Mario. 1934. *Antonio Smareglia nella storia del teatro melodrammatico italiano: attraverso le critiche e scritti raccolti da Mario Smareglia*. Pola: Libreria Editrice Smareglia.
- Smareglia, Adua. 1997. Interview by author, tape recording. Duino.

- Smareglia, Adua. 2000. Interview by author, transcript. Trieste.
- Smith, Patrick J. 1971. *The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- Stuparich, Gianni. 1960. "L'amore per Trieste". In *L'Approdo Letterario* 9, Rome: Eri, 3-5.
- Swafford, Jan. 1998. *Johannes Brahms: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Tedeschi, Rubens. 1978. *Addio, fiorito asil: il melodramma italiano da Boito al verismo*. Milan: Feltrinelli Editore.
- Tedeschi, Rubens. 1988. *D'Annunzio e la musica*. Scandicci, Florence: La Nuova Italia.
- Tomasek, Andrija. 1960. "Istarska svadba u Mariboru" [Nozze istriane in Maribor]. In *Vijesnik*, 24 March.
- Tomicich, Hugo. 1904. *Die Falene: Legende von Silvio Benco, Musik von Antonio Smareglia*, revised ed. Berlin: Verlag von Alfred Katz [the text was first published as an article in the *Musikliterarischen Blättern*, Vienna 1 October 1904 1960].
- Valetta, Ippolito. 1897. *Antonio Smareglia e La Falena*. Reprint 1929. Trieste: Anonima Libreria Italiana.
- Verzini, Flavia. 1985. "Punti estremi del teatro musicale di Antonio Smareglia". University of Bologna graduation thesis.
- Waterhouse, John C. G. 1968. "The Emergence of Modern Italian Music (up to 1940)". University of Oxford Ph. D. thesis.
- Waterhouse, John C. G. 1990. *La musica di Gian Francesco Malipiero*. Introduction by Fedele D'Amico. Turin: Nuova Eri.
- Waterhouse, John C. G. 1999. *Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882-1973): the Life, Times and Music of a Wayward Genius*. Contemporary music studies, 17. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Weaver, William. 1984. *Duse: A Biography*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Wood, Christopher. 1997. *The Pre-Raphaelites*. 4th ed. London: Phoenix and Illustrated.
- Woodhouse, John. 1998. *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Defiant Archangel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Youens, Susan. 1988. "An Unseen Player: Destiny in *Pelléas et Mélisande*". In *Reading Opera*. Edited by Arthur Gross and Roger Parker. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 60-93.
- Zuccoli, Gastone de. 1923. *Antonio Smareglia: monografia sulle opere del maestro con note musicali illustrative*. 2nd ed. Trieste: Circolo Musicale Giuliano.